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"YOU ARE MY LIFE'S LOVE!" ROSAMOND WHISPERED.

THE COUNTESS BENYON.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

SHE had been christened Rosamond, this girl whose love-story I am going to tell you, and who, in the opinion of her kinsfolk, was "only a little black sheep."

Perhaps to the young mother who held her first-born in her arms the title "rose of the world" had not seemed too fair for the little one, but in the eyes of her relations Rosamond was much too grand a name for everyday use.

It was speedily shortened into Rose; and that, Mrs. Lester often declared, was much too fine for a penniless orphan who had to be supported by charity.

Mrs. Lester had five daughters of her own, and her husband was only a country solicitor; so, perhaps, in her children's interest, she had a right to grudge the maintenance of the little wail, who, though she had lived at Kelton ever

since she was two years old, still seemed a creature of another world and nature to her quiet, prim, ladylike cousins.

The lawyer lived in an old-fashioned red-brick house a mile or two from the little town. He went to his office every day from nine till five, except Saturdays, when he left it at two, and Sundays, which he devoted chiefly to repose. He was very little at home, and, being an easy-going man, interfered but little with things when there.

Perhaps Mrs. Lester was on her guard before him. Certainly he had no idea how bitter she made the bread of dependence to his niece, the child his beautiful young sister had put into his arms and made him promise to regard as his own!

Violet Lester had been the *belle* of Kelton. Years younger than her brother, he had loved her devotedly. People said he never held up his head again after she eloped with a young officer. She was eighteen then. Barely three years later she came home sad, weary, and ill, a little child in her arms.

People said her soldier-husband had died in foreign parts, others that he had deserted her—

no one ever quite knew the truth; only, in a few weeks, there was another grave in the little churchyard, and a motherless child in a little black frock was an intruder in the lawyer's nursery.

And that was sixteen years ago. Mr. Lester's niece was eighteen turned now—a slight, graceful girl, with her dead mother's beauty and a certain pride and nobleness of bearing which never had belonged to the village *belle*. She carried her little dark head erectly; her slender willowy figure showed to advantage even in the country-made brown holland, and her coarse straw hat shaded, without hiding, the delicate rounded beauty of her face.

A mother would have loved her dearly—generous, impetuous, passionate and warm-hearted. A mother would have loved her the better for her very faults; but, alas! she had no mother, and her aunt had disliked her from babyhood.

All Rosamond's grace and beauty was an injury to her own children. She ought to have been useful, not ornamental. In vain Mrs. Lester tried to make her the Cinderella of the family; the little black sheep proved herself so unfitted

for domestic servitude that her aunt's housewifely soul was disgusted.

"You will never be worth your salt!" she cried, angrily, coming into the kitchen one brooding August afternoon, and finding Rosamond lost in a day-dream over the ironing, thereby smothering the family linen past redemption.

"You tell me that often enough!" said the girl, a little defiantly. "Aunt Martha, I've wanted to tell you for a long time, I think I'd better go away."

Mrs. Lester looked at her keenly.

"Where would you go to?"

"It's such a great big world!" said the girl, half dreamily, half sadly. "There surely must be a niche in it for me somewhere. I shouldn't want a very big one."

"You're the most ungrateful, good-for-nothing girl I ever met!" cried her aunt, indignantly.

"Here you have a home with us for sixteen years, you share your cousins' education and all their advantages, and now, when you've grown up, and ought to be able to show some return for all we've done, you want to go away. I wonder you're not ashamed of yourself!"

"No one wants me here," returned Rosamond. "I'm tired of being told I'm in the way."

"I don't believe you've a spark of gratitude for all we've done for you."

The girl raised her beautiful eyes and fixed them full upon her aunt's face.

"You never loved me!"

"Who would love such an ungrateful girl!"

Rosamond shook her head.

"But it's always been so; from the very first you never cared for me, nor uncle either, though he's kinder than I deserve. I can remember when I was very little, and someone asked me my name, he fairly turned away his head and groaned."

"And no wonder!" returned Mrs. Lester, gravely. "There, child, it's no use talking, it was a great pity you were ever born, but I suppose you couldn't help it, so dry your eyes, and go out and get a breath of air before tea."

Very seldom had her manner been so kind, but even that could not take the sting from her words.

With a burning sense of injustice, with a bitter longing for an escape from her loveless home, Rosamond put on her coarse straw hat and went out into the pleasant August air.

It was cooler in the fields than it had been in the hot kitchen. The soft west wind fanned her cheeks, the scent of the flowers perfumed the air, but none of these could calm the fever that raged at the girl's heart.

She crossed the fields and entered the village lane.

A little gate stood before her leading to the churchyard. She pushed it open and went in, walking slowly and reverently, as though the spot were very sacred to her.

The Lesters had lived in Kelton for upwards of a century.

Many a tombstone bore their name. But Rosamond passed all there and went on until, in a lonely avenue, she stopped before a grave that stood apart from all the others—a grave marked only by a white cross, which bore only a date of sixteen years before, and the single name—"Mary."

It was her mother's grave.

She had never been told so. No one ever had mentioned it to her; only she knew it. By some strange intuition she knew also that Mr. Lester had wished his sister to be laid among their kindred, and that his wife had opposed his desire with such success that this lonely grave had received the remains of the village beauty.

Rosamond threw herself upon her knees, and cried as though her very heart would break.

True, no one could hear her, no human sympathy could come; but by some strange faith it always had seemed to the lonely girl that her mother must hear her here, that by this little plot of earth she was not so utterly alone as everywhere else.

"Oh! mother!" sobbed Rosamond, "it is all so hard and cruel; there doesn't seem a place anywhere for me in all this beautiful

world. They say I had better never have been born! Oh! mother! if I could only come to you!"

Kneeling there, her tears fell thick and fast, so absorbed was she in her own grief that she never heard the sound of footsteps behind her in the grass; only, when she rose, wearily, to go back to her unloving home, did she see that she was not alone.

A tall, grave, thoughtful looking man stood near her. It was her uncle's partner, John Warburton, the only creature in Kelton who had never spoken an unkind word to the little black sheep.

Without saying anything he began to walk by her side. Only when they had left the churchyard and stood in the little village lane he spoke, and then his words were full of a deep pity.

"What is the matter?"

"Nothing!"

"I saw you in the churchyard," he said, gravely. "Don't tell me it was nothing, child, that made you sob like that!"

"It's nothing fresh!" said the girl, wearily.

"Oh! Mr. Warburton, you'd better not trouble ever to speak to me. Everything I do is wrong. Aunt Martha says it is a pity I ever was born!"

He took the little hand in his, and held it tenderly as a brother might have done.

"She could not!" he cried, angrily, "she dared not be so cruel—so unwomanly."

"She said it," returned the girl, simply, "and I am quite sure she meant it. Do you know, Mr. Warburton, I have been thinking perhaps she was right? You see, no one wants me, and I don't think life's much worth living for."

"Hush!" came from the man's lips. "Hush! never say that, child; you don't know how it hurts me to hear you."

She smiled such a pleased, wistful smile.

"You're just the only friend I have," she whispered. "Oh! Mr. Warburton, I do wish Aunt Martha was like you; you never seem to think everything I do is bad, and myself too."

"I don't think you bad, poor child! Life has not been very happy for you, Rosamond."

"I like to hear you call me that; no one else does—they say it is much too grand."

"It was your mother's choice. I remember her telling me that to her her child was truly 'rose of the world.'"

"Did you know my mother, Mr. Warburton?"

Ah! did he not? Even now, well-nigh nineteen years since she gave herself to another, the question almost unmanned him. He had loved her with his best affection; he would have worked for her, slaved for her; he would have made her a queen and been her truest subject; and he had lived to see her broken-hearted.

"We were friends," he answered at last, while Rosamond's eyes were fixed on him, as though they would read his inmost thoughts.

"Why did you never tell me before?"

"I don't know—I thought you knew it."

"I know nothing about her," replied the girl with a pitiful sadness; "only I am quite sure of one thing—that she loved me."

"She loved you as her own life!"

"You knew her; then you will tell me about her. Oh! Mr. Warburton, you can't think how hard it is to know nothing of one's own mother. Aunt Martha always says 'hush,' when I speak of her, and uncle goes out of the room. I can't understand it, they talk of other people who are dead."

"What do you want to know?"

"I want to know a hundred things. Why did they bury her there, away from all the others? Why do they never mention her? Why, when they wanted a name for the last baby, and I begged she might be Mary, did aunt burst out crying and uncle order me out of the room?"

He sighed; he knew it all so well, only he could not tell the story to Mary Lester's daughter, standing there before him in her youth and beauty.

"Your mother was very unhappy," he said,

at last; "so unhappy that even those who loved her best could not want to keep her longer with them, and she herself was glad to go—save for her little child."

"And they did love her? They did not think her a burden and a nuisance, as they do me?"

"Indeed, no. She was your uncle's pride and delight. Your aunt loved her as a sister."

"And yet they can't love her child."

"They will some day," he answered, soothingly. "Things will come right in time."

She shook her head.

"They have been wrong for sixteen years," she said, simply. "I am tired of hoping for them to mend; besides, Mr. Warburton, it isn't anything I do, it's just everything—even my having been born."

He was a prosperous man. Besides his income as John Lester's partner he had private means. He was barely forty, and young for his years. His heart lay buried in his love's grave, but he could offer a warm affection, a deep tenderness to her child.

Would it not be better for Rosamond to accept the protection of his name—to be his child-wife, his petted darling, than to live on in her present unloving home, to be told day after day that she was a burden, to have her sensitive spirit chafed perpetually by the taunt that no one in her uncle's house wanted her, and she was a penniless dependent?

"Rosamond," he said, abruptly, "how old are you?"

"Eighteen," returned the girl, frankly. "I have not got a birthday, but I know I was born in the summer. Aunt told me so once."

"Not got a birthday?"

"I suppose," she said, naively, "my coming made every one so unhappy they didn't care to remember."

"I can, Rosamond."

She looked at him with glistening eyes. "I do so like you to be kind to me," she whispered; "and Patty is the nicest of all the girls. I think, perhaps, she'll let me come and stay at the Knoll with her when you're married."

Edgar Warburton started. That his partner would not be loth to welcome him as a son-in-law he knew, but he had never guessed his domestic bliss was so far anticipated as Rosamond seemed to imply. Patty was seven or eight-and-twenty, the eldest of a large family, and certainly well-suited to make an excellent wife, only Edgar had never thought of her in that capacity.

"Rosamond," he said, with a strange hesitation, "I am not going to marry Patty; but if you would like to stay at the Knoll, if you think you could be happy there, dear, it shall be your home for all time, and I will do all that love and care can to make your future brighter than your past, and to guard you from every sorrow."

Her face fell.

"It is very kind of you," she answered, not understanding in the least of what his kindness had really consisted. "And I should like to live at the Knoll very much; but it's no use, aunt would never let me."

"But—"

"She doesn't like having me," explained the girl; "but she wouldn't like me to be dependent on your charity, Mr. Warburton. I have no claim on you."

"But if I give you one."

"You couldn't!"

"Yes!"

She looked puzzled. He held her hand in his, and looked lovingly into the velvety dark eyes.

"It can be so, my child; if you will, you can give yourself to me so completely that not only the Knoll, but everything else I possess will be yours just as much as mine, and neither Mr. nor Mrs. Lester, nor anyone else in the world, will have any power to take you from me. Rosamond, you are almost a child, and I am past forty. My darling, can you forget the years between us, and trust your happiness to me?"

"I could trust anything to you," she whispered.

"Then you will be my little wife, the much-loved mistress of the Knoll?"

But Mary Lester's child had inherited from her dead mother something besides mere beauty. The innate generosity and self-sacrifice which had made one willing to give up home, friends, the world for love, refused to let the other take the whole love of a true man's heart without return.

As she knelt by her mother's grave Rosamond was a child—she stood by Mr. Warburton now a woman.

She knew he meant every word he said, that at one step she could escape from her life of dependence to one of ease, luxury and affection. It was a sore temptation.

For one moment she hesitated. She liked him so much, she trusted him so entirely, might it not be that love would come; but if it didn't, if she took all he could offer, and gave him nothing in exchange, the girl knew instinctively the burden of his unrequited generosity would weigh so heavily on her soul that in time to come she would surely hate him.

With almost a child's grace she took his hand, and pressed it to her lips.

"I shall never forget your kindness," she whispered—"never while I live!"

"And you will consent?"

"I cannot."

"But you will love me in time," he urged. "Rosamond, in spite of my forty years, I believe I could make you happy."

She looked into his face.

"I never thought of loving any one until tonight," she whispered. "Never once."

"And now?"

"I don't think I shall ever love any one!" and her beautiful eyes were fixed on the ground.

"Only until I do I will never marry anyone!"

"I thought you said you liked me!" he urged her reproachfully.

"I do! If I didn't, I think it would be easier!"

"Rosamond!"

"I mean I like you too well to injure you."

"Would it be an injury to grant my dearest wish?"

"It would be robbing you to take all and give nothing," whispered the girl; "and wretched as my home is, I would rather have it than come to you and take all you could give me, unless I could give you my heart!"

"I have frightened you!" he said, in a low, tender voice. "I have spoken too suddenly, I shall wait and hope. To-morrow I will speak to your uncle. I owe him my confidence."

"Oh! I don't."

"I must. Don't you see, dear, it is right he should know my wishes."

They had reached the gate of the old red-brick house. No one was in sight, and Edgar Warburton, stooping down, kissed the girl's fair forehead.

"Good-night, my dearest!" he said, tenderly. "Remember, I do not accept your decision as final. I shall wait and hope. If you could change your mind you will find my heart and home ready to receive you."

With one bright glance of gratitude she thanked him, and walked up the gravel path a very different creature from the crying, passion-tossed child we had met weeping at her mother's grave. Rosamond could not be quite miserable now she knew that someone loved her.

Poor child! she little knew that the farewell with Mr. Warburton had been observed by her aunt, and that the thunderclouds of Mrs. Lester's blackest displeasure were ready to burst upon her helpless head.

The solicitor's family did not dine late. A substantial tea, with meat at one end for Mr. Lester, his wife and elder daughter, thick bread-and-butter at the other for Rosamond and the lesser olive branches. Such was their evening meal.

This was in full progress when our black sheep appeared. Her aunt's seat faced the gate, but the girl never attributed the extreme crossness of that lady's demeanour to this fact.

A little excited still at the recollection of what she had just heard, a vivid crimson in her usually

pale cheeks, she took her place at the table and tried to appreciate the cup of like-warm tea and slab of thick bread-and-butter, which presently became her portion.

Mrs. Lester hardly spoke at all till the meal was over, then she followed her husband into his study, and it was fully half an hour before she returned.

She had poured her story into John Lester's ears and he, good, easy man, for once stood up for his sister's orphan child. If Warburton fancied the girl he was glad to hear it.

He could trust him to make her happy, and it seemed a sort of make-up to the poor fellow for losing Mary years ago.

Mrs. Lester was all indignant.

"Then you calmly let your own daughter be set aside for her cousin?"

"Tut, tut! Patty won't break her heart; besides, Martha, you ought to feel relieved!"

"Why, pray?"

"Well, my dear, you have often grumbled at having to give that poor child a home. If Warburton means anything by the kiss you surprised, he means to take our task off our shoulders!"

She should get rid of Rosamond. This thought had never before occurred to Mrs. Lester.

The girl, who vexed her by her shiftless, dreamy ways, by being ten times more beautiful and graceful than her own daughters—the niece of whose birth she could never speak—would be removed from their midst.

A glow of satisfaction filled Martha Lester's heart.

She almost forgave Patty's wrongs.

She followed Rosamond upstairs to her own little attic, when she heard the girl creep away from the general sitting-room.

She pushed open the door and entered, closing it noiselessly after her, and taking a seat on the little white bed, since Rosamond herself occupied the single chair of the apartment.

"My dear," she began, kindly, "I have come for a little conversation with you."

Rosamond looked a little bewildered.

"Have I done anything wrong?"

"Not yet, but I think you are going to. I stand in your mother's place, Rose, and I have a right to your confidence."

A burning blush dyed the girl's cheek.

Mrs. Lester saw she had struck home, and continued,—

"Mr. Warburton is too true a gentleman to kiss you without some cause."

She waited, but no confidence came.

"Do you hear me, Rose?"

"Yes, aunt."

"Then why don't you speak?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Nothing. Do you mean to tell me you have so little pride as to allow a man to kiss you in the open street and have nothing to say?"

The aunt roused the girl; for one instant she regretted her decision—only one—the next she knew she had acted rightly.

"Mr. Warburton asked me to marry him," she said, simply; "I suppose that was why he kissed me."

"Why did not you say so before?"

"I thought girls never talked of that sort of thing."

"Never talked of it! Then how do you suppose they get their wedding-dress and cake, pray?"

"But I shall not want a wedding-dress or cake," said Rosamond wearily. "You don't understand, aunt. I told Mr. Warburton it could not be."

Mrs. Lester forgot herself then, her feeling made her beside herself. This little upstart refuse the prize she wanted for her own girl!

Must she not only lose her desired son-in-law, but have her daily torment (so she described poor Rosamond in her thoughts) to plague her still!

She forgot that her husband's niece was motherless and at her mercy; she raised her bare hand and brought it down with a resounding slap on the girl's fair rounded cheek.

"Take that—and that—and that!" the blows falling in quick succession, cried the angry

woman. "You ungrateful little minx; you ought to be ready to go down on your knees and thank Edgar Warburton for being willing to marry you and give you an honest name—it's none you have of your own!"

Half gladdened by the blows, her cheeks yet tingling, Rosamond slowly collected her thoughts.

"He was not angry with me," she said bravely; "and I don't see what right you have to be."

"You've thrown away your one chance of not disgracing us."

"Why should I disgrace you? Why should I be bound to marry a man because he asks me?"

"Because it's very few men would ask you, especially if they knew the truth."

"What truth?"

Mrs. Lester looked at her steadily. Then a thrill of pity stirred even her worldly heart.

"You'd best not ask, child. You'd best see Edgar Warburton again and tell him you're mistaken, and you'll say yes."

"Tell me!" gasped Rosamond—"tell me what you mean. Aunt, you have said too much or too little."

"The whole place knows it, Rosamond—at least they must suspect it. Your mother was the belle of Kelton. She might have had her choice among the richest men in the town."

"Yes," said the girl furiously, "go on."

"But she lost her heart to a stranger, and she went away with him."

"My father?"

"Your father right enough, poor child, but little affection he's ever likely to show you. He died of your mother within a year; she toiled on, after he left her, for a while longer, just to keep body and soul together for your sake; then she came home here—to die!"

"And my father?"

"We never heard anything of him; he was abroad, I believe. Your mother always held to it that she was his wife. She believed it to her dying day; but she was little more than a child, and I dare say he deceived her easily enough. Your uncle heard later on that he married an heiress before your mother had been dead a year."

No word came from the girl. Her whole face was full of a dumb despair.

"So you see," said her aunt gravely, "you can never hope for such another offer as Edgar Warburton's, and you must accept it."

"Go to him with my burden of shame—take love, honour, name from him, and give him nothing in return!" cried Rosamond. "Never! If I loved him I should hesitate, but as it is I would rather die than do him such an injury."

"It's nonsense to talk about dying," returned Mrs. Lester. "And as to injury, men are so infatuated with a pretty face I dare say he'd feel very much obliged to you. Girls without a name can't afford to be too fastidious."

"Aunt," and Rosamond clung to her imploringly; "tell me about my father."

"There's little enough to tell, child. He was a very handsome man, tall and dark, every inch a soldier."

"And his name?"

"Daryl, Gerald Daryl; he was a captain in the Guards, I think. He came down to Kelton with a friend. They met your mother at the town hall; and after the friend left Captain Daryl stayed on. He scraped acquaintance with your uncle and was always coming here. He was a pleasant man enough, and he made him welcome, little thinking how he was going to pay us out."

"And then?"

"They went off together, and though we wrote letter after letter—though your uncle hunted up more than one Daryl in the Army List, we never found the one; and then, when we had almost given up hope, one summer night your mother came home with you in her arms."

"And surely she mentioned him?"

"As; and she stood to it she was his lawful wife. But she had no proof, poor thing! And though your uncle's a lawyer and used to difficult cases, he saw from the first this was beyond him."

As I tell you, months after we saw the wedding of a Captain Daryl, but it might not even have been the same."

Taking from her pocket a little leather case she put it into Rosamond's hands.

"I always meant you to have this some day. It holds all the clue we have ever had to your father. These are letters from him to your mother, a likeness, and some other things."

For the first time in her life Rosamond threw her arms round her aunt's neck and kissed her.

"I can never thank you enough for these."

"And you will be sensible and marry Mr. Warburton? Indeed, Rose, you must. I shall ask your uncle to tell him to-morrow that your refusal was only a little girlish diffidence."

"And if I refuse again?"

Mrs. Lester looked at her steadily.

"Then you will leave here, and bestow your society on whoever wants it. We have kept you for sixteen years without even gratitude for our reward. I assure you, Rose, I am getting weary of the task!"

She went downstairs, and the girl was left alone. By the light of the moon she read and re-read her precious papers, and a fixed certainty came home to her that her beautiful dead mother had not been deceived—that somewhere or other the marriage she believed in had been celebrated.

"I will find out," said Rosamond, "if it takes my lifetime. Aunt wants to get rid of me. Why should I not run away; it will be better than staying here and troubling Mr. Warburton? It will be something to live for, to struggle for, to hope for, this finding my own name. Perhaps my father is alive and sorry for the way he treated my mother. Anyway, I will devote my life to that one aim. I will never come back here until I can add her true name to the inscription on my mother's grave. And if I never prove her marriage I will never come back at all."

She lay down on her bed without attempting to undress; she was too full of her plans. In all the world she had but one friend whose assistance she could invoke—a young lady whose parents, wishing her to enjoy country air, had once sent her to pass a summer at the old, red-brick house.

Miss Yorke had taken a fancy to Rosamond, and written to her two or three times since. In her last letter she had even expressed a wish that this country girl should pay her a visit.

Rosamond never dwelt on this, it had seemed too utterly impossible; but now that invitation recurred to her as the one speck of hope on her horizon.

She possessed a sovereign; that would pay her fare to London—and then Muriel would help her until she found something to do—that desired goal of so many lonely hearts.

So while the busy household still slept a little figure crept quietly down the staircase, and the six o'clock parliamentary train from Kelton to London carried among its other passengers a quiet, grave-looking girl, to whom no one paid much attention.

CHAPTER II.

KELTON was a long distance from the great, bustling metropolis, and parliamentary trains are not noted for their swiftness. It was past eleven o'clock before trembling, frightened Rosamond found herself on the London platform—the crowd of faces, the noise and din, almost bewildering the country girl, who had never seen a greater number of people than those collected at Kelton on market day.

At last she summoned courage to speak to a porter—an old man, a trifle less formidable than the others. Could he tell her the way to Kensington? Was it very far?

The man looked at the girl in surprise.

"'Tis four or five miles, miss; you'd better have a cab if you've any luggage."

But this her funds would not permit. Perhaps the porter guessed as much by the glance she cast at her shabby purse. The lonely little figure

aroused his interest, and he good-naturedly told her of the metropolitan railway—that great link between eastern and western London.

Rosamond thanked him warmly, but there was a weary look on her face which made him pity her.

At last, when she felt ready to faint from want of food—when she was so tired she longed for any place where she could rest her weary limbs, she reached her wished-for haven—she stood before the tall, imposing house, whose door-plate was inscribed "Dr. Yorke, Physician," and she rang with a faint, heart-sickening doubt that Muriel might be from home.

If so, what could she do? what would become of her? It was almost three months since the date of her friend's last letter. Three months was a long time, much might have happened in it.

A nervous dread seized on the little black sheep; only of one thing did she feel quite sure—if Muriel was there she would be kind to her.

The man-servant stared when the intruder inquired for Miss Yorke—stared so much that Rosamond felt she must have said something wrong.

"Miss Muriel Yorke," she explained. "I have come a long way to see her, and I am quite sure she will spare me half-an-hour if only you will tell her."

The man looked troubled.

"I will tell Dr. Yorke, miss, if you will come in and take a seat."

He showed her into a pretty apartment on the ground-floor, fitted up as a study; books lined the walls, only over the chimney-piece hung a full length portrait. Rosamond's eyes brightened as she looked at it; it was her friend's picture, the blue eyes and golden hair were Muriel's own, the smile was the one Rosamond remembered so well.

It seemed a long time to her that she waited; in reality it was under five minutes. Then a gentleman came in, tall and handsome, with a face almost fatherly in its kindness, and yet so full of sadness that Rosamond almost feared to speak to him. He took her hand and begged her to sit down again, then he placed himself so that he should not see the blue eyes of the fair, pictured face.

"I think you must be Rosamond Lester. I have often heard my daughter speak of you. You were her great friend at Kelton."

"Yes; please let me see Muriel, Dr. Yorke!" and the girl clasped her little hands imploringly together. "I am in great trouble, and I am sure—oh, quite sure, that she will help me!"

He sighed.

"She would have helped you gladly; but you cannot see her now. We have been in great trouble too, Miss Lester, and—"

He stopped, but the look on his face told her the rest. She sprang forward with a cry,—

"Oh, not dead! Don't say that Muriel is dead!"

"We lost her a month ago. My wife meant, I know, to write to you; but her loss has almost laid her on a sick bed, and everything has been forgotten."

"Dead!" cried Rosamond mournfully; "and you loved her so; she had so much to make her happy. Oh, Dr. Yorke, what a pity it was not I!"

"Hush!" he said gravely, "you must not speak like that. You have your own place in the world, which no one but you can fill."

"I haven't got a place at all," said Rosamond, simply. "I am always getting into people's way. Aunt said last night it was a pity I was born, and somehow I couldn't bear it any longer, and so I have run away."

Dr. Yorke said no word of reproof. Perhaps he remembered Muriel's description of this girl and the hard lot meted out to her. He only thought she was his lost darling's friend.

"And you came to Muriel. She would have welcomed you gladly. She loved you well."

"She was almost an angel, and I am nothing but a little outcast! But she loved me, Dr. Yorke, and I thought she would have helped me."

"You may be sure her parents will help you

for her sake," said the doctor, kindly. "Poor child, you don't look very fit for roaming about alone. Come in and see my wife now. This is a sad household just now, but we will do our best for you."

The sweet face went straight to Mrs. Yorke's heart. She took the girl into her motherly arms, and kissed her warmly.

"She is almost worn out, Paul! She must have rest now. By-and-by we will hear her story."

So Rosamond found herself in a pretty bedroom, stretched on a couch, her tired limbs, her aching feet tasting the luxury of repose.

"I could not help it, Annie," the physician said, half-apologetically, to his wife. "I know you will feel seeing a girl's face so soon, but how could I send her away, poor child, when she knows not a soul in London!"

"I am glad you kept her, Paul. I wonder what her story is! How could people be unkind to such a child! What a sweet face she has!"

"She will be a beauty in a year or two," answered the physician. "It is hard to fancy her alighted and neglected; she looks made to be caressed and petted."

When the little waif crept downstairs presently rested and refreshed after her journey, she found Mrs. Yorke alone in the drawing room.

A few questions, and the girl sobbed out her story.

"Don't send me back!" she pleaded, "Dear Mrs. Yorke, I would rather beg in the streets than go back to my aunt now I know what she believes."

She did not mention the episode of Edgar Warburton; she only told her own history as she had heard it from her aunt's lips.

Mrs. Yorke thought it most likely another proof of a girl's trust and a man's betrayal, but she could not find it in heart to say so.

"I will never send you back against your will; but, Rosamond, you don't know the difficulties of a girl earning her own living."

"It doesn't matter. I can bear anything but going back. I swore last night, Mrs. Yorke, to myself, that I would never see my aunt again until I had proved I was not what she called me—until I knew my own name!"

A week or two passed pleasantly enough, and then, as Rosamond adhered to her resolve, the physician found for her an engagement as governess for the little daughter of a countess who had been a patient of his.

The girl started on the journey with some misgivings; and a gentleman joined the train at the junction nearest to Benyon—a handsome, stately man, not far from thirty years of age, with bright blue eyes, and a smile of singular beauty.

He watched Rosamond with lazy interest; he did not admire women generally—a bitter disappointment in early youth had steeled his heart against them; but as he watched the sweet face opposite him he wondered a little curiously who she was, and why, if she lived in that neighbourhood, he had never met her.

The train stopped at Benyon—a little rural station. Rosamond began to collect her packages, to the undisguised surprise of her companion.

He said nothing, however, only sprang lightly to the platform, and walked off, leaving Miss Lester a little nettled.

"He need not have stared at me so," she thought; "and he might have helped me carry these things. He had nothing of his own!"

Rosamond, however, was very agile. She had alighted in time to see her late fellow-traveller in conversation with a liveried footman.

"Why on earth have you brought the close carriage?" he asked, a little angrily.

"We did not expect you, my lord, till the next train. The dog-cart is ordered to meet that!"

"Then why are you here at all?"

"The Countess expects the governess by this train, my lord. The brougham was sent to meet her."

Lord Benyon turned away.

"Will you wait for the dog cart, my lord?"

"I can't. What do you suppose I am to do

with myself for two hours in this wretched hole! I shall have to drive up with the—*the lady*. Tell Willie to go as fast as possible."

"Yes, my lord."

Every word of this conversation had been audible to Rosamond. Two deep red spots of mortification burned in her cheeks. This then was the Earl of Benyon—how could he speak of her so to a liveried servant!

Every pulse in the girl's heart was beating with indignation as she advanced slowly towards the brother of her future pupil.

"Perhaps you will allow me to wait for the dog-cart!" she said to him, in tones of icy politeness. "I should be sorry to inflict my company on your lordship for a five-miles' drive, even if the horses go as fast as possible!"

Lord Benyon looked a little ashamed of himself.

"There is some mistake," he said, hurriedly.

"I believe not; Lady Benyon expects me to-day."

"You cannot be Miss Lester!"

The secret consciousness that she was not, that in very truth she had no claim to the name of Lester or any other, imparted an increased rigidity to her manner.

"I will not presume to contradict your lordship; I believe, however, you will find that Lady Benyon is expecting me this afternoon."

Her luggage had already been placed on the brougham.

Lord Benyon turned to her quickly.

"Allow me to escort you to the carriage. It is nonsense to suggest waiting for the dog-cart; it will be two hours."

She looked at him coldly.

"I am certainly anxious to reach the Castle, but—"

"The carriage was sent for you," he returned, instantly; "but I fear I must ask you to give me a seat in it."

She answered nothing. She disregarded his outstretched hand, and walking slowly to the brougham took place in it.

Lord Benyon followed, feeling more nearly snubbed than had ever been his portion. His preconceived notions of governesses were shattered. Who on earth was this girl, with her beautiful face and her dignified patrician manner? Where had Dr. Yorke picked her up?

He quite forgot his direction to the coachman, and when the horses started at a furious gallop, he exclaimed at the man's reckless driving.

"He is only obeying your orders," said Miss Lester, coldly.

"I had no idea you were listening to them."

"I was not listening."

"But you heard!"

She said nothing, and he began his own defence.

"If you had known the kind of companion I was degrading—a strong-minded woman of fifty, with angular features and blue spectacles, well versed in all the ologies, and wearing cotton gloves."

Rosamond looked at her many unbuttoned kid.

"I don't see anything terrible in your description. I don't fear cotton gloves, they set my teeth on edge; but I dare say the rest of your fancy picture will be true of me—in time."

"A very long time I should think!"

Silence.

"Have you ever been in Blankshire before, Miss Lester?"

"Never!"

"It is considered a beautiful county. I hope we shall be able to make it pleasant to you!"

She opened her eyes.

"I came here to teach your sister, Lord Benyon, not to have things made pleasant to me!"

He decided she was a very disagreeable young woman. Did she always receive compliments after this polite fashion?

"My mother has decided Lillian is getting spoilt," said the Earl, lightly; "but we all help in the spoiling."

Rosamond smiled in spite of her injured dignity, and he went on in the same tone,—

"She is a wayward little fairy, but I expect you'll love her."

"Why?"

"Everyone does."

Rosamond thought of another child whom everyone certainly had not liked. She wondered what it felt like to be loved by everyone as was little Lady Lillian.

"Just now she is in a state of abject terror!" went on Lord Benyon, laughing. "A governess has been held over both our heads for the last twelve months—and I believe Lily's anticipations exceeded mine in their dimness. Poor little maid, she will soon be undecieved now!"

"Are we nearly at Benyon?"

It was her first voluntary attempt at conversation.

"We are in the park now, another three minutes and we shall be at the Castle."

Miss Lester felt a sudden accession of shyness when the carriage stopped, but she sprang out quickly, resolutely declining the Earl's aid.

She saw dimly that the hall was full of servants, and then a little figure in a white frock and floating blue ribbons ran up to her.

"Are you my governess?"

Rosamond confessed to that title; the child looked at her again and then flung her arms round her neck.

"I'm sure I shall love you very much!" she said, gravely—"quite sure! Will you come and see mamma now—she's in the boudoir. Oh! there's Royal!"

The child ran towards her step-brother and kissed him with great affection; then she returned to Rosamond and led her up the broad oaken staircase to a door, before which silk curtains were closely drawn. A very pretty woman in a widow's evening dress sat by the fire.

"Mamma!" announced my Lady Lillian, "here's Miss Lester, and she hasn't got spectacles at all! Brother Royal must have been mistaken, she's quite young!"

Neither Rosamond nor the Countess could help laughing, though both attempted it; that laugh broke down the stiffness of the interview.

"You will find her a shocking dunce, Miss Lester!" confessed Lady Benyon. "I don't believe she can even read; my health is very bad, and the Earl has made her quite a little tomboy."

Rosamond managed to say something in reply, but what she could hardly have told. The Countess was instructing Lily to show her her bedroom, when the door opened abruptly and the Earl entered, looking handsomer than ever in his faultless evening attire.

Rosamond was shown to her room, and when the Countess sent for her she went downstairs with a pretty colour on her cheeks.

She found the Countess alone, the coffee service on a little gipsy table near her; Rosamond at once asked if she should pour it out.

"If you please. Do you know, Miss Lester, you have quite won Lillian's heart!"

The governess smiled a little sadly, and the Countess went on kindly,—

"It is very strange, but we had all expected a middle-aged lady. I fancied Dr. Yorke spoke of you as his wife's friend."

"I was his daughter's."

"Muriel! what a pretty creature she was! It gave me quite a shock to hear she was dead."

"She was too good for this world," said Lord Benyon, gravely—he had entered just in time to hear the last remarks. "Don't you know, mother, there are some persons so nearly angels one knows they won't be with us long?"

"Did you know her?" asked Rosamond, diffidently, not quite sure whether she was expected to talk to him.

"I knew her intimately until about four years ago. I lived in her father's house."

Rosamond's eyes opened so very wide that the Countess came to her relief.

"He never expected that Benyon would come to us, Miss Lester; my husband's brother was in the prime of life, and he had every chance of living till he was ninety."

"In which case I should have needed a profession," said the Earl lightly; "and I would always prefer to save life than to destroy it. I

made up my mind to be a physician instead of a soldier—which has generally been the fate of the younger branches of our house."

"Yes, the Daryls have always been in the army," said Lady Benyon, with a sigh; "I wonder you can reconcile it to yourself to be a civilian, Royal!"

He smiled.

"I have Benyon as recompense. Thanks," as Rosamond handed him a cup of coffee. "Are you as fond of the military profession, Miss Lester, as my mother?"

"I think not."

Coffee was removed, the Countess began some elaborate knitting. Lord Benyon took up a newspaper; but the knitting composed its votary to sleep, and, apparently, the *Times* was not very interesting; for, after a few minutes, Royal tossed it aside, and fell to watching the bright face of his sister's governess.

"Aren't you very dull, Miss Lester, doing nothing?"

She shook her head. She did not want to speak for fear of disturbing Lady Benyon—besides, she had not quite forgiven the Earl for his first remark at the railway station.

"We are not an amusing family, I confess," said Royal, lightly. "After Lillian disappears our conversation languishes. I am afraid you will find Benyon very dull after London, Miss Lester."

"I did not come here to be amused."

"Don't you believe in amusement?"

"A governess does not expect amusement."

"But she might like it all the same."

"One can't have all one likes in this world."

"What a philosopher you are, Miss Lester!"

She rose then, and left the room, disregarding his offered hand, and returning his cordial "Good-night!" by a freezing bow. Certainly Rosamond was too proud for her position!

"I hate him!" decided the girl, as she sobbed herself to sleep that night. "I think I might be very happy here but for him. Lillian is a darling, and I could soon feel at home with Lady Benyon; but the Earl is so cold and cynical, I shall never like him—never!"

And that first rash opinion chanced to be the truth. Never through all their intercourse, never till her life's end did our little black sheep feel for the handsome Earl the sentiment known as liking.

It was a very easy life she led at Castle Benyon. The mornings were generally devoted to lessons, in the afternoons she usually went out with Lillian. Very often Lord Benyon joined them—she could not prevent him. The child idolised her brother, and often teased him into accompanying them. Truth to say he never seemed loth; perhaps he had no idea how distasteful his presence was to the beautiful young governess.

In a few weeks Rosamond felt as if she had lived years at the Castle; the beautiful old place seemed more like home to her than anywhere she had ever lived.

Lady Benyon treated her as a friend, Lillian adored her, and the servants could never do enough for Miss Lester; but between Rosamond and the Earl a deep gulf yawned—never did they become on easy, friendly terms.

She never spoke to him unless she was obliged; she disregarded all his efforts to place their acquaintance on a different footing; and, when she was obliged to talk to him, made her replies as short as possible.

One November day, it was too wet to go out, Lillian and her governess were sitting by the great wood fire in the gallery—at least, Rosamond was sitting and Lillian had thrown herself on the floor at her feet, and buried her head in her governess's lap as she listened to what all children love to hear—a fairy story.

They made a pretty picture, they were such a contrast. The child, in her delicate blonde beauty—Rosamond, bright, dark, and bewitching. It came on Lord Benyon with a sudden pang, as he watched them, that he should miss the governess's sweet, wistful face so early if any chance removed her from Castle Benyon.

"I can't make her out!" he thought, bitterly, as he stood an unseen listener to the story. "To me she is always cold and hard. She treats me

sometimes with positive rudeness; but Lillian worships her, and my lady declares she is charming. What a pretty pair they make!"

The story ended, Lillian roused herself to warm her little hands at the bright fire, looked up and saw her brother.

"Oh! Royal, do come and sit here!" pointing to a vacant chair. "This is the very nicest place in the house, and we are so cosy!"

"I have just been driving to Briary Court," he said, as he took the chair; "but the rain came down in torrents and the wind blew quite a gale. I rather think you have had the best of it, little girl, by this bright fire."

"You have been to Briary Court?" cried the child, eagerly. "Has Lucia come back, Royal?"

Rosamond's heart bent. Who was this Lucia, whose name she had never even heard, whose attractions could induce Lord Benyon to drive five miles on a drenching November afternoon?

"Yes; she has come back."

"Well!" demanded Lillian, imperiously; "and did you give her mamma's message, and is she coming here? What does she look like, Roy? Is she altered? You know it is three whole months since she went away!"

"I don't think she is altered," said Lord Benyon, calmly. "She looked just as beautiful as ever; and she is coming here on Monday to stay for two or three weeks."

Lillian's face looked very blank. Rosamond began to see the child's eagerness to know if Lucia were coming was the eagerness of fear not of hope.

"Oh! Royal," said the little thing, "it will be horrid! I shall be shut up in the study all the time and never see you at all!"

Lord Benyon raised the child and put one of his arms round her.

"What a jealous sprite you are, Lil!"

"Well, you know, Roy, Lucia always does get you all to herself—always!"

"You won't give Miss Lester a very charming opinion of our cousin, Lil."

"She isn't our cousin!"

"She is! I appeal to Miss Lester. Our uncle's adopted daughter must surely be our cousin."

"It would just depend upon how much you liked her," returned the governess, coolly. "Those adopted relationships can be everything or nothing—just as one prefers."

He looked at her steadily.

"I am not sure which extremity I should prefer," he said, coldly, and then he left them.

"Isn't it horrid, dear Miss Lester?" pouted Lillian; "Lucia is so disagreeable!"

"Perhaps you won't see much of her," as an attempt at consolation. "Is she any relation really?"

"She is Uncle Gerald's stepdaughter. Her name isn't Daryl, like others, but D'Este. I think her papa was Italian."

"And does she live at Briary Court?"

"She has lived there since Uncle Gerald died. She is ever so rich, and an orphan. She has a *chaperon*, you know, and all that sort of thing."

"And she is coming here on Monday!" thinking it rather strange she should meet the daughter of her mother's rival; for she had been struck with the name of Daryl being the same as that of her own father, and by studying the letters and papers she had received from her aunt, and after the mention of Uncle Gerald she never doubted that she herself was one of these proud Daryls—if she could only prove it.

"Yes! You see," said Lillian, thoughtfully, "everyone wants her to marry Royal. It was Uncle Gerald's great wish, and papa's too, only he would never interfere. Mamma told me last night she should be so pleased if Lucia came to live with us always. Of course I knew what she meant!" said Lady Lillian, with all the wisdom of nine years old.

Miss Lester took an unusual time over her toilette that evening, or seemed so to her pupil, who was waiting tea for her.

"Why, I thought you'd be ever so grand!" said the child, as Rosamond came in in her plain black gown; "you've been ages and ages dressing, and your eyes are quite red!"

"I burnt my face over the fire," said Rosamond, hastily, beginning to pour out the tea.

Poor girl! She was not nineteen yet, and she had just found out that she had made the most terrible mistake a woman can commit—she had suffered her heart to slip out of her own keeping without obtaining that of the one who had stolen it!

She knew now why she had never felt quite at ease with Lord Benyon—why she had never forgiven those few slighting words accidentally overheard.

She loved him! that was why she could not brook a slight from him in these weeks that she had been shunning him and treating him coldly—almost rudely.

It was the deep passionate love which a true woman feels but once in life.

She loved him, and he was to marry Miss D'Este. Of course he meant to do it—the very tone of his last words implied it; and it was a most suitable alliance—youth, beauty, wealth, and a birth equal to his own. Was it likely he would prefer to such advantages a nameless orphan, who had never treated him even with common courtesy?

Only it seemed to poor Rosamond doubly bitter that history should so repeat itself—that her life, like her mother's, should be wrecked for all time by loving a Daryl—that as Gabrielle D'Este, long years before, had stolen her lover's heart from Mary Lester, so their daughters should now unconsciously be rivals for the same man's love!

"I am quite sure something's the matter!"

Lady Lillian delivered herself of this sentiment when she perceived that Rosamond's trembling hands would hardly hold the tea-pot, and that she made no attempt to talk as usual.

"There is nothing the matter," returned Miss Lester, quickly. "Only I am tired and cross. I don't think staying indoors suits me, Lil."

"You are not cross!" contradicted the child, resolutely. "You never are, except to Royal!"

Miss Lester felt her cheeks burn furiously.

"Don't you like Royal, Miss Lester?"

"Try some of that jam, Lillian, it is your favourite—apricot."

Lady Lillian took a spoonful and then returned to the charge.

"I can't make out why it is that you are so unkind to Royal. I'm sure he never is to you!"

Rosamond pressed one hand to her aching brow.

"My head is very bad, dear. I think, if you finish your tea, I will go and lie down."

Rather alarmed, Lady Lillian complied. She arranged a fur rug over her governess very affectionately, and then walked off to the drawing-room, where she always spent the last half-hour of her day.

"I shall tell mamma you're ill."

"Please don't!" implored Rosamond. "Lil, promise not."

Lillian promised, and, being on the whole a very conscientious little person, kept her pledge to the letter, since she never mentioned the matter to her mother; but in bidding good-night to the Earl she dragged him imperiously to the conservatory to hear a secret, and then confided to him that dear Miss Lester was very ill—very ill, she thought—her eyes were red and she could hardly speak.

"Perhaps she has had bad news, Lil."

"How could she, Royal? She was as merry as possible till—till just before tea!"

He watched the child out of sight, and then he followed in her footsteps up the broad oaken staircase, until he reached the study door. It was unfastened from within; he saw the pleasant gleam of lamplight.

Lord Benyon hesitated just one moment, then he pushed the door open noiselessly, and went in.

CHAPTER III.

At first Lord Benyon thought the room was empty, then his eyes fell on the crimson velvet couch which stood near the fire.

There lay the little figure which, almost without his knowing it, had from the first possessed such a strange attraction for him.

His eyes were keener than his little sister's. He knew at once that Miss Lester's troubles were mental, not bodily.

A great anger filled his heart that anyone should bring tears to those soft, dark eyes; then he went up to her and spoke her name.

Very slowly those large eyes opened. Then she started to a stiff, bolt-upright position, shaded her brow with one hand and asked wearily,—

"Did you want Lady Lillian, my lord? She is not here. She went downstairs some time ago."

He bit his lip impatiently. It always hurt him seeing that she would persist in addressing him so pointedly by his title.

"Lily has gone to bed, Miss Lester; but first she confided to me a great secret. She was afraid you were very ill."

"I never felt better," said Rosamond, taking up a trifle of fancy-work and beginning it energetically all the wrong way. "You have sacrificed your convenience enough to your little sister's fancy. Now pray return to the Countess."

"I shall not return until you have answered me one question," he cried passionately. She fixed her eyes upon the ground.

"Why do you hate me so?"

"I don't," she said slowly; "and if I did what would it matter to your lordship?"

"No!" he cried bitterly; "you don't honour me sufficiently even to hate me. You simply scorn me!"

"It would be very rude of an inferior to contradict you, my lord."

He stamped his foot angrily.

"Why will you persist in calling me that?"

"It is your title."

"Miss Lester!"

"Yes."

"Do you think you treat me quite fairly?"

"Yes," she said feverishly. "I am quite sure I mean to pay you all fitting respect."

"Don't be absurd! You are very fond of Lillian."

"I love her dearly," surprised into the avowal.

"And I think you like my mother."

"I am grateful to the Countess for her kindness."

"At any rate, you treat her as a friend. Why cannot you extend the same kindness to me?"

She was silent.

Looking at her keenly he could see the unshed tears glistening in her large, dark eyes.

"Well," he asked, in a curious tone, "what is it to be. Shall we be friends, Miss Lester?"

"No!"

"At least you are frank. Tell me your reason!"

"I have none. You need not mind my rudeness, Lord Benyon. You have plenty of friends—Miss d'Este."

His face changed.

"Lucia is not my friend."

"No! I have heard that she is something more. Lord Benyon, may I wish you happiness?"

"Happiness to one you won't even have as a friend! How can I believe your sincerity?"

"I am quite sincere!" and the girl's voice shook with deep emotion. "Lillian has been telling me all about Miss d'Este, and I do hope you will both be very happy."

Without a word he turned away and left her.

"I was terribly rude," reflected Rosamond.

"He meant to be all kindness, and I—I treated him, as he said, like dirt; but I could not help it. I was so afraid he would guess the truth; and oh! whatever happens I must keep my secret."

Three days later Miss d'Este arrived. Rosamond was introduced to her at luncheon, which formed the school-room dinner.

The girl forgot her dependent position then, and she raised her beautiful dark eyes to Lucia's

face to see what kind of a wife Lord Benyon had chosen—what charms were owned by the daughter of the woman who had filled her mother's place.

She saw a woman of five or six-and-twenty; tall, fair, and majestic, dressed in all the elegance of Parisian fashion; a woman with whose face no fault could be found, save that the expression was a trifle hard, and the features lacked animation.

Rosamond was not a poet, or she might have described Lucia d'Este as soulless.

The young heiress sat at Lord Benyon's right hand, and her manner showed pretty plainly that she considered him her own property.

She made herself very much at home; called Lady Benyon "aunt," and administered cutting snubs to that spoilt pet Lillian.

As to Rosamond, beyond a chilly bow she took no notice of her at all; a governess was quite below Lucia's attention.

"It is a beautiful afternoon, Royal!" said the Countess; "I suppose you and Lucia will go for a drive. You ought to take advantage of this fine weather."

"Will you drive?" he said, turning to his cousin. "There are one or two improvements I have been making I want to show you."

"Take me too!" pleaded Lillian. "I've done all my lessons; and there's hopes of room for me and Miss Lester in the barouche!"

Lucia honoured the governess with a prolonged stare.

"I can't take you to-day, Lil!" said the Earl. "You promised!" said the child in an aggrieved tone. "You said next time it was fine you'd take us!"

"Pray don't let me make you break your word," said Lucia, haughtily to Royal. "I can stay at home with aunt."

"You could go too!" said Lil.

"I am not fond of the society of nursery-maids!" said Miss D'Este, scornfully; "what-
ever Royal may be."

A burning flush dyed Rosamond's cheek. She dared not look at the Earl, but she directly knew that he checked an indignant protest from Lady Lillian. Then she heard nothing else until the Countess said to her kindly,—

"I am going out this afternoon, Miss Lester, to make calls; I shall be very pleased if you will come with me. It is dreary work paying visits alone."

Rosamond knew quite well that Lady Benyon had meant to stay at home over the fire. The expedition was planned on the spur of the moment to atone for Lucia's rudeness, but she did not undervalue the kindness for all that.

So Lillian accompanied the lovers, and her governess found herself *à la suite* with Lady Benyon—an occurrence which did not often happen, for the Countess was very far from strong, and some days she reclined on the sofa alone in a darkened room for hours.

"My dear," she said nervously, as they started—"you must forgive my niece's rudeness. Lucia is a little peculiar; poor child, she had a most unfortunate bringing-up."

Rosamond smiled a little sadly.

"She is very beautiful."

"She is the image of her mother. I do not often speak of my sister-in-law, Miss Lester. It was a most unhappy marriage. They were utterly unsuited to each other. Lord Benyon's passionate wish for children was disappointed, and his wife led a very neglected life."

"Was he fond of her?"

For the life of her Rosamond could not help that question.

"I never thought so," said the Countess, slowly. "He married her for her beauty. I have always fancied he had been disappointed in some early attachment, and only married for the hope of an heir when he succeeded unexpectedly to the title."

"I have seen a picture of him in the gallery," said Rosamond, slowly. "He looked happy enough."

"When I knew him first he was the gayest, most fascinating of young officers. He changed suddenly; grew gloomy and severe, almost

morose. The one creature to whom he never spoke unkindly was Lucia D'Este."

"He loved her!"

"I don't know. He came to see us a few months before his death. He was hale and well then, but he seemed to have a presentiment his end was near. He told my husband he felt that our Royal would one day be Earl of Benyon, and he said it was his dearest wish that he should marry his daughter."

"Meaning Miss D'Este!"

"Of course! He never had a child of his own. He wrote to Royal on his death-bed a letter containing the same request, and said it would be found repeated in his will."

"And was it?"

"My dear Miss Lester, the will was never found! It was the strangest thing! We hunted for it high and low, until at last my husband thought he must have destroyed it."

"And in any case Benyon must have been yours."

"In any case the estates and title must have come to my husband; but Gerald had large savings and many valuables. We have always fancied that the will left these to Lucia. That is why we are so anxious that her stepfather's wish should be fulfilled. You see we never can be quite sure we are not enjoying what should be hers; and I tell Royal again and again the most honourable thing is to marry her."

A strange mad thought crossed Rosamond's mind. What if she was the daughter referred to by Gerald, Earl of Benyon!

What if that missing will told of her right to the name of Daryl! Only for a moment did she cherish the hope. Then she dismissed it as vain and fruitless.

"You see, I tell you all our secrets," said the Countess pleasantly. "I look upon you quite as a friend. When Royal and Lucia are married I hope to make a home for myself and Lillian near London. There you must come and share it with us."

The words were kind, the manner was more than kind; but Rosamond could express no gratitude.

She was conscious only of one feeling—that life would hold for her nothing worth the living for when once she had listened to the chimes of Royal's wedding bells.

The calls were a relief, since—before strangers at least—Lady Benyon must talk on indifferent topics.

She introduced Rosamond as her young friend, Miss Lester, and certainly the governess had no reason to complain of her reception.

One lady, the last upon whom they called, seemed wonderfully attracted by the beautiful girl, and at last she said to Lady Benyon,—

"Surely Miss Lester is related to your family! I have been wondering ever since she came in whom she resembled, and now it has flashed on me suddenly."

The Countess smiled.

"I fear the resemblance must be an imaginary one, Lady Greville, for we are certainly not related."

"And have you never noticed the likeness?"

"Never. I cannot think to whom you see even the faintest resemblance."

"The late Lord Benyon, your husband's brother."

"Gerald was fair," said the Countess.

"Ah! but his features were just the same style as Miss Lester's; his expression—the very turn of his head—are the same. She has just the Daryl type of face. Forgive me," she said courteously to Rosamond, "for thus discussing you, but Lord Benyon was an old, old friend of mine, and the resemblance struck me at once. You need not mind it," with a kindly smile; "I can assure you he was a very handsome man."

They found little Lillian waiting for them on the terrace steps, looking unmistakably cross.

"I didn't enjoy myself one bit," she cried, in an injured tone. "Mamma, when is Lucia going away! Will she stay much longer?"

Lady Benyon looked troubled.

"Where is your brother, Lil?"

"He's in the library," returned the child,

"with Lucia. He took her in there to warm herself when we got home. He never thought I might be cold, and want a warm too."

"There are plenty of other fires," said her mother, smiling; "we are not reduced to one."

But she made no attempt to enter the library. Holding her little girl's hand in hers she went upstairs into her own room.

It struck on Rosamond like a sudden revelation that the Earl was offering his heart and hand to Miss D'Este, and that his step-mother had divined his occupation.

Miss Lester excused herself going to the drawing-room after tea, but Lillian came up from dessert to tell her the news.

A strange gravity was on the childish face; she rubbed her face against Rosamond's soft cheek as though to invite her sympathy.

"It is quite true, Miss Lester."

"What is true, Lil?"

"Royal is going to marry Lucia; they settled it this afternoon. She is going home to Briary Court this week, and the wedding is to be in December."

"So soon?"

"Yes, Miss Lester, how could he do it?"

"Hush!" said Rosamond, gently. "Lil, you are too little to understand. When people love each other they generally want to be married."

"But Royal doesn't love Lucia!"

"He must, Lil."

Lil drew a sigh of unmitigated relief.

"Then perhaps he'll make her nice—she's quite horrid now! Don't you think so?"

Rosamond Lester had dreaded few things in her life more than her next meeting with Lord Benyon. She had not seen him alone since that evening when she had refused him her friendship. Well, he would not want it now. His beautiful wife would fill his thoughts and leave no room there for anyone else.

It was a lovely morning—one of those balmy autumn days which come so early in November. Rosamond and Lillian went to gather chrysanthemums before breakfast, which was at ten during Miss D'Este's visit, in deference to her tastes.

Lil had secured a big bunch for herself, had fastened two vivid crimson ones in her governess's blue dress and then she espied a favourite puppy in the distance, and darted off in pursuit of it.

Rosamond followed slowly, her dark eyes bent on the ground, her thoughts so preoccupied that she never noticed the sound of footsteps until she heard her own name in Lord Benyon's voice. Looking up she saw the Earl standing at her side.

"What a lovely day! Who would think it November?" she said, speaking very rapidly that he might not notice how she trembled.

"It is well enough. You are out early."

"Yes; we came to gather flowers."

"Ah! Aren't you going to congratulate me, Miss Lester, on the flower I won yesterday, the beautiful and accomplished mistress I have chosen for the castle?"

There was a ring of such misery in his voice, such a bitter mockery in his laugh, that Rosamond forgot her pride—forgot her own sorrow. She remembered only that such as he was this man was her life's love, and that his being unhappy could take nothing from the sting of her heartache. For once she dropped her cold, icy indifference—for once she let him see her a tender, sympathetic woman.

"I hope you will be very happy," she said, looking up at him with tears shining in her eyes.

"It is so very likely."

"You have known Miss D'Este from childhood, I believe; you must, therefore, be well acquainted with her character," said Rosamond, gently. "You would hardly have chosen her to be your wife if you had not thought she would make you happy."

"You speak almost as if you cared!" he said, angrily.

"I do care."

"And yet you refused me your friendship, you—"

"I think there is nothing so utterly wretched

as an unhappy marriage, Lord Benyon," said the girl, slowly. "No misery like that of being bound to a creature uncongenial to one's self. I think I should be very sorry for the merest stranger who was so bound; therefore, though we are not friends, I am quite sincere in my congratulations. I do hope you will be happy."

"Are you speaking from experience?" he asked, hoarsely, "are you bound to an uncongenial union?"

"I!" and she laughed at the question. "I am perfectly free, Lord Benyon, so free that I can do what I will with my life, and be accountable to no living being."

"Then you are an orphan?" he said, eagerly. "I always thought so."

They went out to breakfast then, but Rosamond had quite recovered her composure; she listened to discussions respecting the wedding with stolid indifference. When Lady Benyon begged her assistance in writing notes of invitation she acquiesced at once, and carried off the delicate cream-laid paper to the study to begin at once, much to Lillian's delight, for that young lady saw in the preparations a holiday for herself.

She did not bestow much of her society upon Rosamond; her mother wanted her, she said, so Miss Lester busied herself about the notes, and had finished the whole number full half-an-hour before the luncheon hour. Tired and dispirited she threw herself in a chair.

"This won't do," thought the girl, gravely. "How am I to get on through all the wedding festivities if I break down just at writing about them?"

She walked to the book-shelves, and tried to find something amusing, but, except those specially devoted to Lillian, they contained for the most part old works of reference; one after another she opened in vain. At last she caught sight of one bearing marks of such frequent perusal that she felt it must be interesting.

"Some one has read it a hundred times, it can't be like *Margrave on Property*, or *Henke on Beauty*."

It proved to be that favourite and most enchanting of all Thackeray's novels, "*The Newcomes*."

Rosamond was in the act of reading the first chapter when something thin and smooth dropped out from beneath the pages. She held it for a moment disengaged in her hand, and then cast her hand half carelessly upon it.

It was only a letter; it might have lain there for years or have been placed within those pages; but the night before, but its seal was unbroken and it bore the address:

"To my brother, the Honourable Royal Daryl, to be opened on the day of my funeral."

Rosamond started; she knew quite well whose hand had penned that line. The letter was from her dead father; it doubtless proved her mother's honour—she felt an inward certainty that it was so.

On his death-bed the Earl had been seized with remorse, he had striven to right a little the wrong he had committed years before.

She sat irresolute. Once the thought of all that letter might contain would have filled her with wildest joy; now she knew she would have given up all claims to the name of Daryl if only she could have owed Royal's love.

But his love was not for her; she owed it to her dead mother that this letter—come so strangely, so marvellously to light—should be read; and, after all, her being his cousin could not injure Royal. He would still have her father's title, estates and wealth; it could not hurt him that she had a right to call herself by the name of Daryl!

That afternoon she went quietly into the billiard-room, where she knew she was pretty sure to find the Earl alone. He looked surprised when he saw who was the intruder.

"Lord Benyon, may I speak to you?"

A strange light came into his eyes, then it faded, as he remembered that, however her manner might change to him, no hope of winning her could be his now he had proposed to his step-son.

"What can I do for you, Miss Lester?"

"I was reading a book this morning off the blue shelves in the study, and—"

"And you tore it, or burnt it, or otherwise damaged it," he said, lightly. "So you have come to confess your misdeeds; do not trouble yourself about it, I will forgive you whatever injury you do to my property."

"It is not that; please don't be angry."

"Do speak out," he said quickly; "you know quite well I am not likely to be angry with you, and that you would not care one jot if I was."

"I found this. I thought you ought to have it."

He took it carelessly, then his whole face changed.

"You found this—where?"

"In the 'Newcomes'."

"Ah! it was my uncle's favourite book, Miss Lester. Do not mention this matter to anyone."

She left him then, little thinking the effect of her morning's work; presently he came up to the study.

"Will you give me the 'Newcomes,' Miss Lester?"

She handed it to him.

"You are not of an inquisitive turn of mind or you would have made further researches—see."

He took up a pen-knife and slit the brown-paper-cover of the book from end to end; several envelopes dropped out—envelopes the exact size of the book fitting it so precisely it was no wonder their existence had never been suspected.

"Was your uncle mad?" asked Rosamond, in alarm.

"No, but he was bitterly unhappy; he suspected everyone about him, his wife most of all. I understand everything now; this book was his constant companion, and in his morbid distrust of those about him, he contrived this hiding-place for the papers he wished to keep secret."

"Have I done anything wrong?"

"You have done nothing," he said gently; "it may be you have proved Miss D'Este's claim to part of the fortune I have always thought mine; but there will be plenty left for me!"

"And as you are going to marry her, what is hers, will be yours!"

There was no one by.

Lord Benyon forgot everything then but that the girl who spoke was beautiful, and that he loved her, with a wild, hopeless passion for her raging at his heart.

He had proposed to another woman, but he loved her, and her only. He took her hand in his two burning ones.

"Answer me one question. Do you know why I proposed to Lucia D'Este?"

"Release me! you hurt my hand."

"Answer me!"

"Because you loved her!"

"Love! I could as soon love a beautiful animal as such a soulless, heartless woman! The one creature I loved laughed and scoffed at my affection! It was clear to me she would have none of me, and I had an uneasy feeling that I had inherited, through a legal mistake, the fortune my uncle intended for Lucia! I despaired of happiness. I thought I might as well sacrifice myself to justice."

Rosamond's eyes were bent on the ground, still holding her hands with one of his.

Lord Benyon gently raised her head with the other.

"Look at me!" he whispered. "It is too late to undo the past, but you owe me this much. Tell me why you treated me with such contempt and scorn!"

"I can't."

His eyes were looking into hers now. He read her secret, and a bitter anguish filled his soul.

"Oh! little girl; is that it? Have you sacrificed us both to your pride?"

"I thought you didn't care!"

"I love you as my life, as my own soul, and you have driven me to place an unconquerable barrier between us."

"There was always that!"

"You told me you were free!"

"I can never marry anyone," she whispered. "Royal," using his name almost unconsciously, "don't you understand? I should bring a heritage of shame with me! My mother died at twenty-one of a broken heart, and—no name is on her grave."

"And you think that would have divided us?"

"Yes."

"I should only have loved you the more; you would have been all my own!"

A long, long silence. Her head was pillowed on his breast. His lips were pressed to hers again and again as though he could never weary of the contact.

Both of them had forgotten Lucia D'Este and the question she had answered only twenty-four hours before.

I think, in sorrows like these, it always is the woman who returns first to the consciousness of her misery.

"Please go," murmured Rosamond.

"And leave you?"

"You know we must forget—at least, not forget, I can't do that—but we must meet as strangers!"

"Let me speak to Lucia, and appeal to her generosity!"

Rosamond shook her head, she believed Miss D'Este's heart to be as hard as the nether millstone—and she was not much mistaken.

"Perhaps she will discover our secret, and set me free. Perhaps"—and he touched the papers on the table—"these will make her such a great heiress that she will aspire to something grander than an alliance with me."

"Please go," repeated Rosamond. "Don't you know that every moment you stay makes it harder for me?"

"I am going. Darling, tell me one thing—your name! Let me cherish my darling in my heart by a fonder title than Miss Lester."

"I was christened Rosamond," she whispered.

"Royal, it is the only name I have a right to bear."

"Rose of the world," quoted the young lord, thoughtfully. "I shall not forget."

It was hard to compose her beating heart and aching head to listen to Lil's questions; it was harder to amuse the child all the evening, because a message came that Lord Benyon had gone to London, and the Countess was ill in bed.

"I am quite sure something is going to happen!" said Lil, dejectedly.

"Your brother is going to be married."

"It's worse than that. Do you know I was in mamma's room when Royal said good-bye! What do you think he said?"

"How can I tell?"

"Mamma asked, 'when are you coming home,' and he answered, 'to-morrow night, I hope. Heaven only knows how long we shall be able to call Benyon home!'"

The Earl returned the following afternoon, accompanied by his lawyer. Miss D'Este and her chaperone had a long interview with the gentlemen in the library.

Then Lil and her governess saw the heiress enter the brougham and drive away.

"She's gone home," cried the child. "I'm so glad. Why, here's mamma!"

It was indeed the Countess. She sent Lillian away, and then she took Rosamond in her arms and kissed her forehead.

"My dear child, you little know what a change you have brought about by your discovery of yesterday! Tell me, do you remember my friend remarking upon your likeness to Gerard, Earl of Benyon?"

"Yes."

"And you suspected nothing?"

"I knew before I came here that my father was called Daryl!"

"You thought the relationship was a disgrace, dear? The papers you found yesterday prove the marriage of Gerald Daryl and Mary Lester, besides the birth of their only child—Rosamond—yourself. You are nameless no longer. Royal has told me your fears. You are Lady Rosamond Daryl, heiress of Benyon."

"Oh! not that!" cried Rosamond, "not that,

dear Lady Benyon! I couldn't rob him of his birthright. I had rather be poor and nameless all my days."

"Might not some other arrangement be possible? Royal loves you well. I think from your tears you are not indifferent to his affection."

"But Miss D'Este."

"Lucia has candidly declined to bestow herself and her beauty upon a penniless earl. Royal does not seem heartbroken. Rosamond, we know the truth now—even that the daughter your father intended to be Royal's wife was not Lucia, but the little girl he had last seen a baby when he left her mother."

"Why did he leave her? Oh! Lady Benyon, if you knew what she suffered!"

"There was cruel mischief made between them. Lucia's mother, she who was later on Gerard's second wife, taught him to believe your mother unfaithful. It is a sad story, Rosamond!"

"How did you know that?"

"The moment Royal had read the papers he felt certain you were Lady Rosamond Daryl. Dr. Yorke's story confirmed his belief. A few necessary forms may have yet to be gone through, but the great truth remains—you are mistress of Benyon, and we are almost as poor as in the old days when Royal studied medicine with Dr. Yorke."

Lord Benyon did not come to congratulate his new-found cousin; he kept aloof from her with a persistence which wounded her to the quick. Already he talked of leaving Benyon, though the Countess and Lilian were to remain as Rosamond's guests.

For a week she bore up bravely, then her love conquered her pride.

Lord Benyon, sitting alone in the library in the firelight, felt a little hand upon his arm.

"Rosamond!"

"Why are you so cruel to me?" she whispered. "Do you know you are breaking my heart! Don't you love me any longer? Can't you forgive me for being your uncle's child?"

"I shall love you till I die!" he answered. "But you forgot you are a great heiress, and I—"

"You are my life's love!" she whispered. "Royal, do you think it costs me nothing to tell you so? Dear, if you leave me I shall die!"

He did not leave her. His pride was very strong, but love was stronger still.

The Earl of Benyon married his uncle's daughter, and cherished her as Heaven's best gift to him.

Years have passed since then. The name of Daryl is now inscribed upon that lonely country grave.

The Countess Benyon is far more admired at Kelton than in the days when she was only a little black sheep; but in her husband's eyes she never can be fairer than the night she knelt before him in the winter firelight, and he listened to the story of her love.

[THE END.]

BERYL'S MARRIAGE.

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CHAPTER XIII.

It was the strangest honeymoon ever known. Now and again one hears of persons marrying either to save a fortune or to join some rival claims to a property and agreeing together to be husband and wife in name only; but Beryl's case differed from all these, in that she had been wooed with every mark of passionate affection, and had believed till within two days of her wedding that Sir Denis loved her just as she loved him.

After that terrible explanation with her husband a doubt did strike the bride that she had misjudged him; but it was quickly banished.

With his own lips he had confessed that he "could not have married a poor woman," and the thought of this hardened Beryl's heart against him.

Yet, strange anomaly though it was, Lady Adair did not regret her marriage. She loved her husband, though she had lost her faith in him, and it was some consolation to her to feel that her money had saved the home to which he was so much attached, and would also grace his future with every luxury.

That this very fact of his indebtedness to her would be as gall and wormwood to a man's proud spirit she never thought. Poor girl, she was utterly wretched on that bleak winter's night when she sobbed herself to sleep, and yet through all her misery ran this one ray of comfort, that she was Adair's wife, and nothing in the world could part them.

Probably she slept better than Denis, for his face was pale and almost haggard when they met at breakfast. The change in him from the happy bridegroom of the day before was so terrible that Beryl felt almost frightened, and wished (for the fiftieth time, poor girl) that her unknown visitor had never come to the Oaks with the story of Nell's wrongs; but had left her happy in her fool's paradise.

Sir Denis hardly spoke during the meal. He helped his wife to bacon, and placed a screen between the back of her chair and the fire; but he said nothing beyond the few words absolutely demanded by the requirements of the meal; and the silence was so overpowering that it made Beryl feel so nervous she longed to scream aloud. If only he would speak. She could bear angry reproaches—even bitter words better than this awful silence.

Presently she had her wish. In a tone from which every semblance of feeling seemed to have fled, in cold formal words, Sir Denis informed her of the hour at which the boat started, and that it would be better for them to leave their hotel about twenty minutes previously.

Beryl felt she must keep him talking. She could not bear that fearful silence to return, so she asked one or two questions about their journey, and he replied in the same measured terms. Then he seemed about to leave the room, but suddenly changed his mind, and, closing the door carefully, came quietly to her side.

"Perhaps it will be better for us both if I refer now to our conversation of last night, painful as the subject naturally is."

She bowed her head.

Her whole soul was yearning for a word of love. She longed to fling herself into his arms, and beg him to forgive her and love her still. She longed to tell him the past was over, and they had their present and future to live together in affection; but, alas! Beryl was of a reserved nature, and before she could force her trembling lips to utter the thoughts passing through her mind the opportunity was lost.

"Sit down," said Sir Denis, courteously, "I will not detain you long."

"I think I understood you," he said, when she had mutely obeyed him, "that in spite of the evil opinion you had formed of my character and my motives in marrying you you preferred to remain with me, nominally as my wife."

"I do prefer it."

"Remember," he said, gravely, "Mr. and Mrs. Dent love you too well to doubt your decision. If you elect to return to them they will, I am sure, blame only myself for our matrimonial failure."

She looked up at him then with flashing eyes. "I will never go back to them. I will never tell them of my mistake. Aunt Julia is old-fashioned, and believes in happy marriages. She wouldn't understand me."

Sir Denis thought Mrs. Dent might be forgiven, for he found it very difficult himself to understand his wife.

Which was real—the girl who had loved him so passionately, and seemed to live only in his love, or this proud cold woman who would have none of his caresses or affection?

"You are aware of the arrangements made for our future," he went on coldly. "We were to spend the early spring abroad, and return to England in April, practically this means a *tête-à-tête* of four months; don't you think that under the circumstances you will find it very dull?"

She shook her head.

"I am not afraid of that."

"In fact your pride is such you will suffer anything rather than people should suspect the true position?"

"Yes."

"Well," and he rose as if to end the interview, "but if the plan of life you have laid down for us proves intolerable, don't blame me."

He had reached the door by this time, when a little trembling voice called him back.

"Denis."

"Well."

"Please don't be angry with me; remember I suffer most."

"I am not the least angry," he replied. "Your sufferings are all of your own creation. Beryl, but I dare say you think they are very real. I am going out now, but I shall be back in plenty of time to escort you to the train."

Things were not quite so bad when they were in France; perhaps a certain natural chivalry for women as a sex made Sir Denis pay all possible courtesy and attention to his young wife during the brief space they remained in Paris.

He was always her escort in public, he took her wherever she wished to go, and never seemed weary of sight-seeing, and perhaps, if Beryl had not remembered the old time when love shone on his face and sounded in every tone of his voice, she might have been content; but when a woman has received warm passionate love courtesy is a very poor exchange.

But perhaps Beryl would not have felt the difference in Denis quite so bitterly but for a visit she paid on the last evening of her stay in Paris.

Sir Denis came in unexpectedly about five o'clock with a brightness she had never seen on his face since their wedding-day.

For once he addressed her without the coldness which had well-nigh broken her heart.

"Whom do you think I have met, Beryl?"

"I have not an idea. Some one nice or you would not look so pleased."

"My cousin Betty. She married the greatest friend I have in the world; he's a literary man and so they have no settled home, but wander about wherever the fancy takes them. They are spending the winter here. Talbot is clever but struggling, and Betty hadn't a silver sixpence, so their ménage is not at all grand, but they want us to waive ceremony and dine with them to-night, and I said I would ask you."

"I should like it of all things," said Beryl, warmly.

"You understand they live very simply; he's French correspondent to an English paper, but it's not one of the leading journals, and I expect he and Betty have a hard struggle."

"I should like to go," said Lady Adair. "I don't judge people by the length of their purse, Denis."

But poor Beryl was to suffer acutely before that evening was over.

Two years married, the Talbotts were lovers still, and the poor little heiress, to whom love meant the one thing worth having, envied the wife of the struggling *littérateur*.

The two ladies had plenty of time to grow intimate, for their husbands lingered an unconscionable while in the dining-room over their cigars.

Betty Talbot, was perhaps four years Beryl's senior; she was a bright, vivacious little woman, not beautiful or even pretty, but with a great charm of manner more fascinating, perhaps, than actual beauty.

"I am so glad I have seen you," she told Beryl, "you know when my uncle was alive I lived at Heron Dyke and was just like a sister to Denis, and when I heard he was married I was so glad."

"Why?" demanded Beryl a little anxiously.

"Because he is so good," said little Mrs. Talbot, "and so few people could understand him. Denis has the kindest heart in the world, yet strangers call him proud and cold. He is just the sort of man," went on the little lady with a quaint air of decision, "who was made to be married to a nice wife."

"And you wanted to see if I deserved that all-expressive adjective?" asked Beryl.

"Oh, I *knew* you were nice," said Betty confidentially, "or Denis would not have married you, he is so proud. The moment I heard he had married an heiress I knew two things, she must be very beautiful, and he must be passionately in love with her, or he would never have risked being taken for a fortune-hunter."

Lady Adair bit her lips.

"The moment I saw you," went on Mrs. Talbot, "of course I understood it all. You are so beautiful a man *couldn't* be suspected of thinking of your money. I think you are good enough even for Denis, and that's the highest praise I can give you."

"Have you seen Heron Dyke lately? By the way, why do you call it so? Denis always speaks of the Court."

"Heron Dyke is the name of the village—hamlet rather," explained Mrs. Talbot, "and in my uncle's time his house was the only building in the place larger than a cottage; but a new man, a Mr. Blake, has run up a hideous red brick pile now within the bounds of Heron Dyke, and Denis always calls his old homestead by its proper title of Adair Court, but I think I prefer Heron Dyke."

"Do you know Mr. Blake?"

Betty laughed.

"He's very rich, and he would give all his money to be a gentleman and possess a title. As titles are not to be bought he has given up the idea for himself, and puts his hopes on his two girls. They are twins, you know, but, of course, he would make the one who marries best his sole heiress."

"Are they nice?" then as though to explain her curiosity, "they will be my nearest neighbours, I suppose?"

"You won't see much of them. The Blake family will defeat you cordially, for Beryl—may I say Beryl?—you have blighted their dearest hopes."

"But how?" asked the bride in surprise.

"Mr. Blake held a mortgage on the Heron Dyke property, and it is an open secret he wished to settle the transaction amicably by Denis becoming his son-in-law."

"And was Denis agreeable?"

"My dear girl, don't look like that," cried Betty, eagerly. "Of course he wasn't. He worships you, and, besides, I'll tell you a little secret. Denis hasn't set eyes on Mr. Blake's twins since they were twelve years old, and—they are not sixteen yet."

The gentleman and coffee came in together. Mr. Talbot began to talk to Beryl, and Sir Denis lingered by the tray of china and silver, over which his cousin was presiding.

"Well?"

"When I first saw her, I thought her beautiful," said Betty, who knew just the question intended by that sharp, inquiring monosyllable, "and now I've talked to her I am quite sure she is a darling. You are a very lucky fellow, Denis, and I am delighted to think dear old Heron Dyke will hold up its head in the county once again."

"I often wish Beryl had not had a penny."

"Then you are very foolish, Sir," said the

bright little matron; "for I can assure you pennies are very useful. By the way, she had a prodigious number of pounds not pennies, hadn't she?"

"Nearly half a million."

Betty opened her eyes.

"And I've been talking to her on terms of perfect equality. Why she must have thousands a year. And Dick hasn't thousands of shillings," said Betty blithely; "yet Beryl didn't seem to look down on me at all. Oh, Denis, you are a very lucky fellow."

When she took Beryl upstairs later to put on her "things," Betty stopped before the door next her own and said gently,—

"I am going to show you my greatest treasure."

It was a child, a little yearling boy, who lay sleeping peacefully in his cot. A great joy and pride came into his mother's face as she looked at him, but Beryl's eyes filled with tears.

"You must be happy," she said, simply.

"I am," returned Betty cheerfully, "absurdly happy, considering we are nothing but genteel paupers, but then you see, I've Dick and Dicky."

Just then she noticed the tears in her friend's eyes, and they puzzled her exceedingly.

"Some of these days," she said gently, "you will have as many treasures as I have, and meanwhile you've got Denis, and he is a host in himself."

"I have got Denis," agreed Beryl, feeling it impossible just then to say more.

"And when you have a son he'll be a much more important person than my Dicky," went on the young mother gaily; "it will be a case of 'bon-fires blazed and joy bells rang to welcome the little heir' when you set up a nursery. Now, Dicky isn't heir to anything, unless it's his father's talents, and neither of his adoring parents have yet been able to detect in him any taste for literature."

Beryl made some light reply, but she turned away from the child's cot with an aching heart. When she set up a nursery. Why that day would never dawn. The joy-bells and the bon-fires would never be lighted if they were to be in honour of her child, since fate had ordered that she should be a wife in name only.

CHAPTER XIV.

MONEY won't last for ever.

This is a fact unfortunately which none of us can deny, and there is another fact equally true, though less generally known, that money gained by any evil means seems to have less staying—and less providing—power than that which we have honestly toiled for, or which has come to us lawfully by inheritance or free gift.

Audrey Nugent was destined to find this out before the New Year was many weeks old. The sum she had received from Dick Chesney had seemed to her considerable. She had regarded it almost as a small gold mine, but no money she had ever had had melted away quite so rapidly.

To begin with, when it came Nell was in such a state that she needed a great deal spent on her. Leaving Hinton-street so hurriedly and travelling to the Isle of Wight cost a good deal, while lodgings, food, and general necessities came to a far higher sum at Ventnor than they can be procured for in an Islington side-street, and so the money which had seemed such wealth to Audrey took to itself wings.

She was thankful that Nell had had no part in her sin. It had been done for her sake. She was to reap the benefit of it, but Nell herself was as unconscious of the sin as the man who had suffered so terribly by it—Denis Adair.

Nell believed that an old friend of their mother's, hearing of their trouble, had sent a handsome present to take them to Ventnor, and try the effect of a winter there on her health.

Audrey had not the heart to undeceive her, though when Nell talked dreamily of their return to London, and wondered if Sir Denis

Adair would need any more documents typed, Audrey had to say plainly they should probably see and hear no more of the baronet.

"It's so different when a man marries, dear," she said; "his wife never likes the women he knew when he was a bachelor; and, besides, Sir Denis treated us as friends and equals. His heiress-wife would probably look on us as of the same class as her maid, and keep us severely in our proper place. No, Nell, that page is closed for ever, and when I get to work again I must not expect to see Sir Denis Adair among my patrons."

Nell hesitated. She was quite certain from Audrey's manner that her sister was keeping something back, and she felt vaguely uneasy. It was not the first time Audrey had tried to lure her sister into a false security, the deception being from the tenderest motives. But Nell had liked the young baronet, and was sorry to think he could be in any way connected with the trouble she felt sure was concealed.

"Have you quarrelled with Sir Denis, Audrey?" she asked at last.

"A typist doesn't quarrel with her best customer," retorted Audrey. "There, Nell, it is a shame to tease you; I haven't seen Sir Denis Adair since he came to say good-bye to us in Hinton-street, when you heard every word he said."

"And he was as kind as possible; but you spoke as if you thought we should never see him again."

"I hope we never shall."

"Audrey!"

Audrey broke off her thread with a vicious jerk and threw down her needlework with a frown.

"I liked Sir Denis well enough, Nell, but I won't be patronized by his wife. We are quite as good as the soap-inventor's grandchild, and I don't see why Beryl Chesney should trample on us just because she is rich."

"But you have never seen her," objected Nell; "she may be very nice."

"I have seen her," confessed Audrey, "and I took an intense dislike to her."

Nell sighed; that explained a great deal, for Audrey was given to take dislikes to people at first sight, and nothing ever changed her verdict on them; years of kindness, repeated and constant, from anyone she had conceived a prejudice against would have been powerless to alter her opinion.

"I am so sorry."

"It's not worth being sorry about," said Audrey, sharply. "Look here, Nell, I am tired to death of being poor; I hate everyone who is richer than we are. If I were a man I think I should become a paid agitator; I feel just like it. When I pass shop-windows full of things we want (I don't mean luxuries, but just necessities), I feel as if I had a perfect right to go in and take them. Why should half the world go in satin and the other half starve in rags?"

But Nell could not understand this reasoning; she only felt dimly Audrey was in one of her "moods."

She loved her sister dearly, but she felt positively frightened of her at such times.

She tried hard to soothe her, but when Audrey gave way to these fits of wild anger it was impossible.

"Do you know," she said, slowly, "I think some of our ancestors must have been rich people, Audrey, or you wouldn't mind poverty so much."

"Mother was never rich," said Audrey fiercely, "and she hated rich people just as much as I do. I can't remember father well."

Neither could Nell, and their mother had never spoken of him. They knew absolutely nothing of him except that he had been a curate and was dead.

There was an old friend of Mrs. Nugent whom the girls believed to have been fully in her confidence, but this lady went abroad with her husband some years before their mother died, and they lost sight of her; besides, neither of them expected any good from seeking out any unknown relations they might possess. If their father had

had rich friends Mrs. Nugent would certainly have commended her children to their care.

"Well," said Nell at last, "I can't be sorry we came here, dear, for I feel like a new creature; but I can't bear to think of going back to London; leaving you will seem horrible after this beautiful Ventnor, and I am afraid you will have lost all your connection by staying away so long."

"My connection!" said Audrey, scornfully; "what did it do for me! it just brought in enough to prevent our starving. I'm sick of typewriting, Nell. I want to be rich, and to set my foot on the neck of the people who have persecuted us."

"No one persecuted us, dear," said poor Nell, who felt overwhelmed when Audrey was in these moods, "and I don't see any chance of your becoming rich."

Neither did Audrey. She had changed her last five pound note, and the question of ways and means was troubling her sorely. Help came from a source she little expected. Their landlady's daughter served in a shop for ladies' and children's ready-made underclothing. A shop of a highly superior class, where dainty embroidery and fine needlework obtained a fair price. The girl offered to show some of Nell's finest stitching to her employers, with the result that an offer came from them to supply Miss Nugent with as much work as she could do, and at a price which would amply cover the expense of her staying on in her present quarters, at any rate until Audrey was in work again, and had prepared a little home for her in London.

They had never been parted before, and to Nell the mere thought of the coming separation was full of pain; but Audrey faced it with a stoical philosophy.

"I shall not mind fighting hard for myself if I know you are safe here," she said to Nell with a little of the old tenderness, "and Nell, you would hamper me just now. I am tired of working at semi-starvation prices. I mean to strike a blow for better pay. If I had you at home to talk me into a good temper whenever I felt indignant I daresay I should go on meekly putting up with things; but if I know you are here, provided for, so to say, I can rush headlong into the fray."

Nell did not understand; she knew of many forms of female industry, but it seemed to her—except a few which required capital or special training—none of them were likely to produce more money than Audrey had made in good times by typewriting.

"I hope you will succeed, dear," she said, gently; "and oh, Audrey, don't do anything dreadful!"

"What do you call dreadful?" demanded Audrey. "I tell you, Nell, I am getting desperate. I would carry a hot potato can (only it's the wrong time of year) or draw pictures on the pavement, I would lecture on Women's Rights or turn female detective. I'd join the Salvation Army and beat a tambourine in uniform. I don't care what it is, only I must make money."

Nell shivered. She ought to have been used by this time to Audrey's bursts of petulance; but the fact remained they still had power to terrify her.

"You won't do anything rash!" she pleaded, "and you'll come back to me some day!"

"I'll come back if I get on. I don't think I could bear to come if I were a failure."

"But where are you going?" demanded Nell, "you can't rush off to London, without even knowing where you are to sleep! The rooms in Hinton-street may not be to let."

"I should not go there if they were," said Audrey shortly. "Nell, you must trust me a little, and let me go without telling you all my plans. I am not quite so rash and foolish as you think. Only trust me, and before long you shall know all."

And Nell had to yield. There was no resisting Audrey when she spoke like that. Mechanically, the elder girl set about the packing, insisting in her large-hearted generosity that her sister should have the best of their joint belongings; then with Audrey's solemn promise to write "very soon" she had to let her darling leave her.

It was the first real separation of their lives, and Nell felt it terribly.

Audrey felt it too; but she set her teeth like a vice, and said nothing only when the train started and she gradually lost sight of her sister's form standing on the platform a hard, defiant look came upon her face. It was as though with Nell all the softening influence had left her life.

The months of complete rest at Ventnor, the better food, the more restful life, had done something for Audrey. In spite of the discontent and repinings, the remorse and rebellion struggling in her heart, she looked very different now from the half-starved girl Denis Adair had found at the British Museum.

The half-shadowy resemblance to Beryl Chesney had become more pronounced, only it was to a harder, older Beryl than the girl who had become Denis Adair's wife.

Then Nell's skilful fingers, when free to devote their labours to her sister, had produced a radical change in Audrey's appearance; her plain black dress, close-fitting jacket, and straw hat trimmed with lace and a spray of spring flowers no longer revealed her abject poverty; in fact, it was possible now to look at Miss Nugent without guessing the low ebb of her fortune.

When she reached Portsmouth she walked off the boat with a quick decided step, and took her place boldly in an empty carriage of the London train.

A boy passed the door selling papers, and she bought one, more as a shield from the conversation of intrusive fellow travellers, if the carriage filled up, than for any curiosity as to the world's affairs.

She was holding it half-open in her hand when suddenly, almost by accident, her eyes lighted on an advertisement, which was destined to change the whole current of her life.

"The Principal of a Private Inquiry Office requires the assistance of a lady. No previous experience necessary, age immaterial; but must be educated, intelligent, and able to hold her own in society. Strict secrecy indispensable. Apply, personally, between the hours of two and five, at No. 29, Ashley-court, Temple, E.C."

Audrey Nugent read and re-read these lines with ever-growing interest. As she had told her sister she was ripe for any exploit, however rash. She cared little what she undertook, so that it was a change from the years of drudgery she had gone through, and promised substantial pay.

She had not the faintest idea what duties might be required of her; but she had two points in her favour—she was by nature silent and reserved. She was living absolutely alone, and so would have no one to whom she could reveal official secrets, even if she felt so inclined.

She had been fairly educated, and though she had never mixed in society she knew quite enough about it not to infringe any rule of custom or etiquette.

She left her luggage at Waterloo, and walked slowly across the bridge, and so on by Wellington-street into the Strand.

It was about three o'clock, so she was well within the hours specified. The streets were unusually full, or else they seemed so to Audrey after her long sojourn at Ventnor.

A strange sense of desolation seized on the girl. In all this bustling throng she had not a single friend. In all this crowd of human beings there was not a creature who cared what became of her. The very thought that she did not even know where she should sleep that night depressed her. It had come into her head as she walked across the bridge how easy it would be for her to disappear. One leap into those cold still waters and rest for ever.

There would be no inquiries, no fuss. Nell did not even expect to hear from her "for a week or two." She was carrying nothing that could identify her, even her clothes were unmarked.

After all it was not the fear of wrong-doing which preserved Audrey Nugent from the sin of suicide. It was more the longing to enjoy life just for a little while before she left it which took her safely across the bridge. The intense desire to taste something of ease and luxury—to have what a girl of a lower class would have de-

scribed as her "fling" while she was still young enough to take pleasure in it.

She could form not the least idea for what purpose the inquiry office required her services, and she did not much mind; at least it would be a change. She would be relieved of the miserable calculations as to how little food would keep body and soul together. If she obtained the post she would—probably—be able to live while the work lasted "as a lady."

Besides her innate discontent Audrey Nugent had an intense jealousy and hatred of every creature whose life was brighter or more prosperous than her own. She had revelled in destroying Beryl Chesney's happiness at the time, though remorse filled her heart later, and her victim's pale fair face haunted her.

No. 29, Ashley-court differed in nothing from the other ancient houses in the time-honoured precincts of the Temple. At least, that was Audrey's first opinion; but when, in answer to her knock, a small boy in buttons flung open the outer door which shut in the apartments on the first floor rented by Mr. Tulloch she had to change her mind. The outer room, which in ordinary course would have been the "clerk's office," was furnished as a handsome sitting-room, with a Turkey carpet, brass fender and fire-irons, a well-stocked book-case, and a suite of substantial oak furniture upholstered in dark green leather. At the end nearest the outer door a small corner had been pulled off by means of a glass partition, behind which, on a high stool, the small boy in buttons evidently sat to open the door and answer inquiries. On the present occasion the large room was occupied by a dozen or so ladies, who had evidently interpreted one part of the advertisement (age immaterial) in its broadest sense. The boy looked at Audrey Nugent a little suspiciously.

"Have you an appointment, ma'am?"

"No; I have come about the advertisement; it said apply personally between two and five."

The boy groaned.

"You're the ninety-ninth, ma'am," he said civilly; "they began coming as soon as I got here at ten; in fact, I found two outside waiting for the door to be unlocked. Will you take a seat?" he went on as he marshalled her into the large room, where everyone already there stared at her curiously.

A bell sounded, and the boy escorted the lady nearest a green baize door through it—apparently to his master's presence.

Mr. Tulloch's own room had another entrance communicating with the passage, but which only opened from the inside, he usually let his visitors out that way, but everyone was admitted by the boy in buttons at the more formal entrance.

Audrey looked at her companions, and thought they did not seem very formidable rivals. Their ages ranged from twenty to sixty. They were all more or less shabby, all more or less depressed (chiefly more), and most of them bore the unmistakable label of governess stamped on themselves or their attire. It is strange that constant association with the young should result in making women most unyouthful; but so it is.

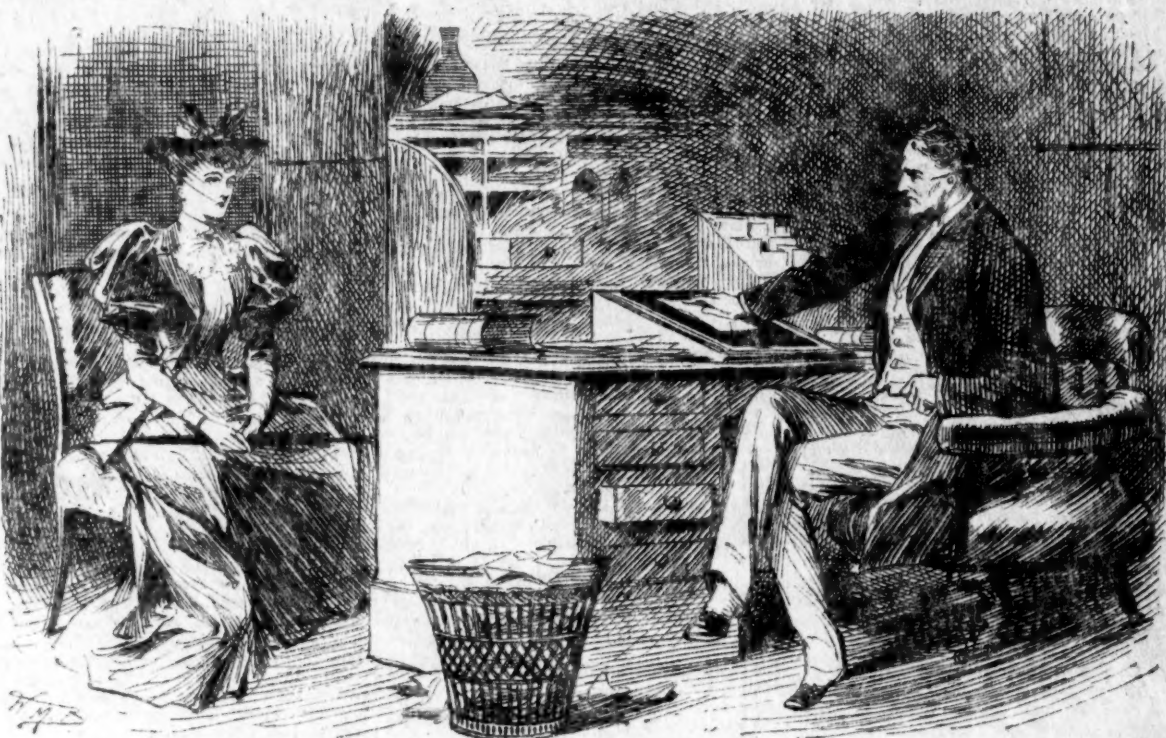
Apparently Mr. Tulloch was a man of few words, for the bell sounded again in exactly three minutes. At this rate, Audrey reflected, it could not have taken him very long to dispose of the eighty-six competitors he had already interviewed.

"It's monstrous," said a stout lady (with sausage curls) who sat by the window; "he can't explain anything in that minute of time. The idea of dragging people twenty or thirty miles, and then dismissing them in a few seconds."

"Perhaps he goes by appearance," said a rather coquettish old-young lady arrayed in paper-like black silk, "and then it wouldn't take him long to judge."

"For my part," said a meek-looking woman near Audrey, "I'd rather know my fate quickly. It's cruel the way some of the ladies I see go on, talking for half-an-hour, and going into minute particulars when all the while they mean to send a post-card saying you're too old or not accomplished enough, or something like that."

Audrey had waited something like three-quarters-of-an-hour when her turn came. She



"YOU ARE VERY SENSIBLE, AND I'LL ENGAGE YOU FOR THREE MONTHS CERTAIN," SAID MR. TULLOCH.

found herself in the presence of a tall middle-aged man with dark hair, bushy black eyebrows and a clean-shaven face. He looked at her keenly.

"Sit down," he said, shortly.

There were two doors between them and the room she had just left. The inner one was of a thick green baize. Mr. Tulloch sat with his face to this as he motioned Audrey to a seat opposite.

"Look here," he said, bluntly, "don't tell me what a wonderful situation you have had, or what admirable references you can produce, just answer me a few questions as briefly as you can. I have seen ninety-nine ladies, and you are the only one whose appearance suited the requirements of the work. I must have someone who can sustain the part of a lady of leisure visiting wealthy friends. Can you do it? I am willing to advance a small sum for clothes, to 'dress the part' so to say."

Audrey nodded.

"I have a good memory, I can hold my tongue about other people's business and I never mention my own."

"Good. Age?"

"Twenty-four."

"Belong to a large family—half-a-dozen gossiping brothers and sisters?"

"An orphan. One invalid sister at Ventnor. I should tell her nothing."

Mr. Tulloch liked the business-like replies; he eyed Audrey once again cautiously.

"Ever been at this sort of work before?"

"Never. Earned my living at type-writing and making extracts from books at the British Museum."

"Pay pretty bad?"

"Starvation."

"Ah, well I pay by results, two guineas a week and all expenses while at work, a lump sum when the case is successfully finished. I have an enormous connection as a private detective, and I keep four ladies in my employ, but I have three fixed rules. I never take anyone who has been a governess, and the moment one of my ladies be-

comes engaged to be married I dismiss her. In our line a woman wants plenty of brains, and when she's in love one half of them are wool-gathering."

"I think your rules are very fair," said Audrey. "I never had a lover in my life; I am not likely to have. I have seen too much of poverty to listen to the love of a poor man; what chance have I of meeting with a rich one?"

"Ah!" Mr. Tulloch felt more than ever certain he had made a lucky find in this very plain-spoken young woman. "You are very sensible, Miss Nugent, and I'll engage you for three months certain. I've a very delicate piece of work on hand, which needs plenty of finessing; can you be ready to go down to Kent to-morrow? ostensibly as a guest in a country house. The man makes a huge fortune and doesn't quite know how to behave as a gentleman of leisure. He has been troubled lately by a strange succession of robberies; in each case it seems clear the thief is a member of his own household. The last thing to go was a diamond necklace he had purchased for his daughter. The wife is a good-natured simpleton, and will not be in the secret of your profession. She will imagine you are the daughter of one of her husband's old friends who needs country air. You must keep the secret of your real object in becoming her guest inviolate; you will have opportunities of watching the household carefully, and learning their different theories as to the robberies."

"You expect more robberies, then?" asked Audrey.

"Yes. When a thief gets off scott free he usually grows bolder and bolder; you'll want all your wits about you, and remember, hint nothing till you've full proof. You will be treated in all respects as an honoured guest, and have nothing to complain of. Can you go to-morrow?"

"Yes, if you advance sufficient money; such things as evening dress and other toilet requisites cost far more if they have to be procured ready made."

"True. I'll take you round to the shop we patronise for the business; we can order what you want, and tell them to send the things down to Heron Dyke direct."

"To Heron Dyke!" repeated Audrey, in a strange tone, and he noticed every scrap of colour had left her face.

(To be continued.)

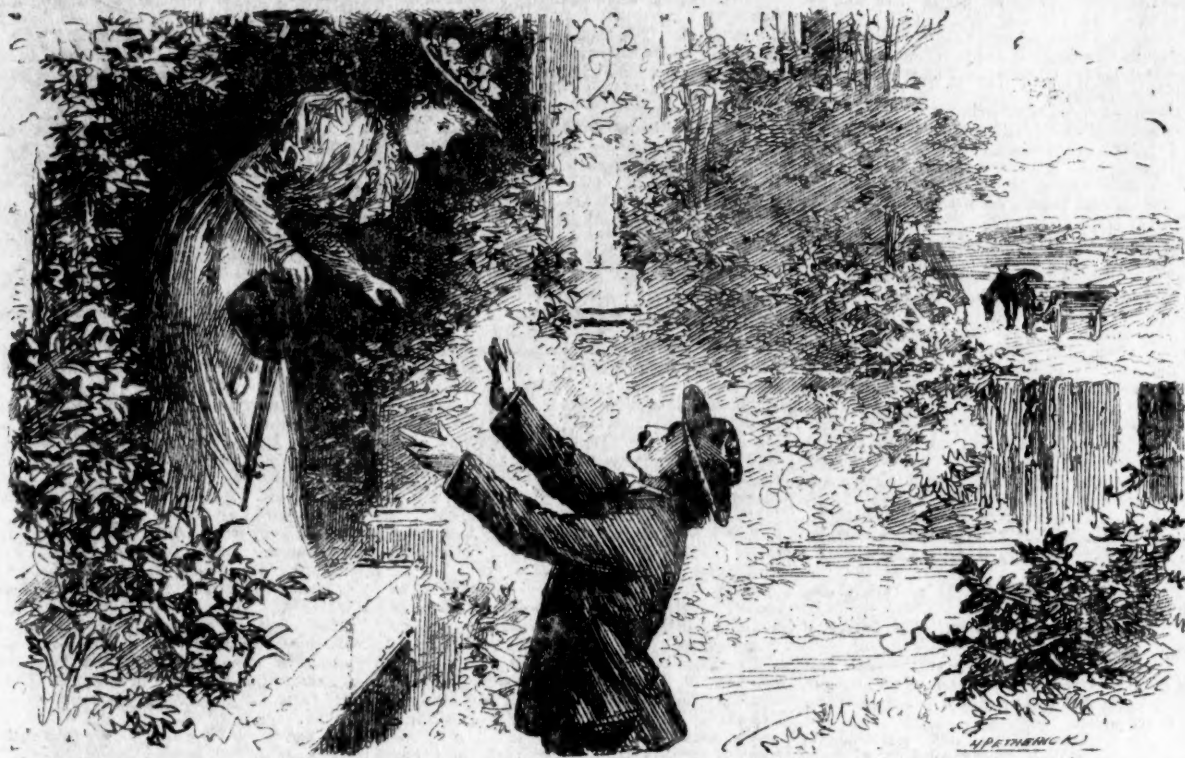
In Ecuador there is a tribe of Indians, the Jovaro, who kill their prey by blowing a poisoned arrow through a pipe. A monkey pierced by one of these arrows dies in three minutes.

VAST quantities of flowers are gathered for perfumery purposes. Each year it is estimated that 1,800 tons of orange flowers are used, besides 930 tons of roses, 150 tons each of violets and jasmynes, 75 tons of tuberose, 30 tons of cassia, and 15 tons of jonquilla.

THE theatres in Japan have curious pass-checks, which are positively non-transferable. When a person wishes to leave the theatre before the close of the performance, with the intention of returning, the doorkeeper, with a rubber stamp, imprints on his palm the mark of the establishment.

THE name nicotine is a reminder of Jean Nicot, a French nobleman and Ambassador to Portugal. In 1560 he sent a quantity of tobacco seeds from Lisbon to Paris, stating that they were the seeds of a valuable medicinal plant that was just then highly appreciated in Portugal, into which country it had been introduced from America forty years before.

THERE is a rock in the bed of the Rhine, near Bacharach, that is called the Altar of Bacchus. It is usually covered by water, but when there comes a dry season it appears above the stream. When this occurs there is rejoicing all along the Rhine among the vintagers, for it foretells a good season for the vines, and prosperity for themselves.



RONALD DUNDAS, WITH OUTSTRETCHED ARMS, WAS AWAITING HER THERE, ON THE SWARD BELOW.

THE ROMANCE OF IVY MOSS.

CHAPTER V.

DAWN.

No—no midnight marauder, as she feared, but Ronald Dundas in the flesh!

He saw Ivy, and recognised her. He started—he was already very pale—came quickly forward, and sank upon one knee at her feet.

Too amazed and startled yet to address a word to him, she could only stand there petrified and rooted to the spot, as it were, with her quivering arms outstretched for support against the wall behind her.

"My dear one, forgive me!" Ronald whispered passionately. "I did not mean to disturb or to alarm you; but I couldn't help it. I found the skylight in the slates unfastened and movable. It seems, however, that it closes with a spring; and I was speedily made a prisoner. I struck a light, and luckily found a bunch of old keys; or—"

Ivy's terror-frozen heart was beginning to thaw, so to say. Her tongue became loosened, and was once more her own, as it were.

"But—but, Mr. Dundas," she gasped, "what is the meaning of this—what are you here at all for? It is—it is terribly wrong! Why, oh, why did you do it?"

"Ivy, I love you!" he stopped her breathlessly, "I love you, and I mean to rescue you from the desolate and unnatural life you are at present living. Dearest, believe me, this house in the hollow is no fit place or home for you. The old wretches here have wickedly deceived you—you are nothing to these people—you are not of their kin. I am convinced of it now from what I have heard about them and yourself in Bleak-ferry, at Breedy Point, and elsewhere. Yet, before making this known to you, I was determined to ascertain the truth for myself—and to-night I have done it! Ivy, sweet, you must quit this

place—say adieu to it for ever—the very hour I can arrange for you to fly with me to a happier shelter and brighter scenes. Dear one, with me you will be safe. No one can take you from me, or can harm you in any wise, when once you are my wife!"

"In pity," she whispered distractedly, "not so loud! You will awaken my grandmother else; and that would be terrible—worse than terrible, if she found you here! Go—please go!"

"I will. But first you must promise me solemnly that you will be in the sand-pits amongst the gorse to-morrow morning—nay it is already morning!—not later than eleven o'clock. Then I will explain everything to you."

"Oh, I'll promise anything—anything—if you will only go and leave me now!" Ivy moaned, almost sobbed, wringing her hands in an anguish of distress.

He sprang at once to his feet, and clasped her in his arms. She was too weak and unnerved—indeed, completely powerless—to resist him in the slightest. She could only lie passive in his sustaining arms, whilst he pressed his lips on hers.

"Farewell, beloved, for a few hours," he murmured. "Now show me the best way to escape—and I am gone!"

"The best way," Ivy repeated dazedly to herself, "which, I wonder, would be the best way? Yes—yes, I know," she cried suddenly "that would be the safest and the quickest!"

"Tell me, darling!"

"See—straight before you—down this passage," she explained feverishly, "is the door of my room. The window is exactly opposite the door; the doors themselves, as you know, are merely a few feet from the window-ledge. There can be no better way than that. Oh, be quick, Mr. Dundas, if you would be kind to me—and go!"

"Not until I have heard you say with your own sweet lips—'Ronald, I love you!'"

It was, this extraordinary midnight encounter, but the fourth time in her life of seeing him.

Yet she—poor moth in the flame!—obeyed him nevertheless.

"Ronald," she breathed, trembling exceedingly "I—I love you!"

"Ivy," he murmured in reply, caressing her soft head, "you are all the world to me, love. My pretty Ivy, Heaven shield you and bless you always!"

Again he strained her to his heart, with his lips fastened on hers. Then releasing her, he vanished down the dim, dawa-lit passage; and Ivy was alone.

No more sleep or rest for Ivy Moss that night! The old familiar life, as it were, had been suddenly wrecked.

Was she plunged in deep stream, or about to sight the precincts of some glorious unknown shore?

Whither was she drifting, or rather being hastened—swept onward by a mysterious and invisible current?

Where and how would it all end?

Was she deliriously happy, or prodigiously frightened? She did not know; she could not decide.

But it seemed to her, somehow, that the old Ivy Moss was gone—dead—and she was changed into someone else!

She rose betimes to sit by her open lattice casement, and to gaze over the beautiful undulating downs; and the fresh, pure, searching air of early morning wrought her more good than anything else could have done.

It cooled her aching head and fevered eyes, and brought surely back to her the bodily vigour of which the excitement of the past night had wholly robbed her.

So she watched the sun rise and spread upward from the chill lovely east, seaward, and the pallid dawn-mists roll silently away from the dim chalky uplands of the breezy downs—dreaming, dreaming all the while of the great change ahead of her, and of Ronald Dundas.

Blithely the soaring lark shook the dew from

his wings, telling the waking world that another day was come.

She heard the old witch-faced woman stir, presently, downstairs; and then Ivy arose from her chair by the easement, and descended to join her grandmother.

"Did—did you sleep well, granny, after all?" Ivy ventured to inquire, as she spread the cloth for breakfast and set out the homely crockery.

"Pretty well," grumbled the old woman; and as she said no more, Ivy felt safer.

She strolled thoughtfully to the open back-door.

Why, where was Pincher this morning? Why had he not, as his habit was, come scampering indoors the moment he heard anyone moving in the house. He was never chained to his barrel.

Ivy wandered out into the sunny court, gazing up and down it and over the low wall into the yard.

Then she called and whistled for Pincher, but there was no glad bark in reply.

Where could he be, her dear little terrier companion and friend? She ran to his tub and looked into it.

Taken a sharp cry burst from Ivy's lips, and she fell upon her knees by the barrel's mouth. There upon his side among the straw he lay, his glassy eyes open, his swollen tongue hanging from his jaws. Ivy's cry of grief quickly brought out the grandmother.

"Is he dead?" said the old woman, turning very white.

"Yes—quite dead," was all that Ivy could say.

The old woman stooped over the little dead dog, and examined warily the hanging tongue. Then she looked up at Ivy, and said in an awestricken whisper,—

"It must have happened last night when the cock was crowing in the moonlight. Pincher's been poisoned, that's plain. Who can have done it, I wonder? Oh, Ivy," whined the grandmother, "didn't I tell you that misfortune was coming? It's in the air. And now—and now, depend upon it, there's worse for us behind."

"Do not take it to heart so, Ivy! I cannot bear to see tears in those sweet eyes of yours. In a little while hence you will be far away with me from that dismal dwelling in the hollow yonder. We shall be always together, you and I, with no cares, no troubles, and as happy as the day is long."

"It seems so much to have lost in a single day, at a single blow, as it were," she answered sorrowfully, although Ronald's dear arms were holding her as they sat there together in the gorse-grown sandpits, with Heaven's own fair radiant sky for a canopy overhead. "Faith—one's utter faith in one's nearest and best—shattered at a single blow; and then never to know—"

"Dearest, do not any more call that old scoundrel your 'nearest and best.' The old man is nothing to you, nor you to him; I am convinced of it. He is a sort of social outcast—a pariah—and you must forget in time that you ever knew him. As I tried to make you understand last night, Dell Cottage is no fit abode for you, my darling. You must forget it as you forget the old man."

"That will not be possible," said Ivy, sadly still. "I have known no home but that; and—and my grandfather has been so good to me always. I owe him so much. Indeed, everything."

"You owe him nothing, sweetheart—and he is not your grandfather. He has wronged you wickedly; and I am going to take you away from him," said her lover, almost sternly.

Ivy sighed heavily; and the tears welled up again and fell in her lap.

"Then, too, there is Pincher," she said. "I loved him—and now he has gone also. All is gone. I seem to be losing everything."

"Come, darling, are you not just a trifle childish?" said Ronald, half gently, half playfully. "Pincher, after all, was only a dog. A precious ugly, and, I fancy, a dangerous one."

"Ah, but he was so faithful," Ivy answered reproachfully.

"No doubt. But someone, I suspect, with a hatred of stoats and other vermin, had been throwing poisoned flesh about; and poor Pincher suffered in consequence," rejoined Mr. Dundas lightly.

"I do not know—I wish I did," said Ivy, shaking her head mournfully.

Talking in a light and tender vein Ronald Dundas did his best to soothe and to comfort her—to encourage, to brace her, so to say, for the ordeal that lay ahead of her.

And Ivy was with him, his arms were around her, his shoulder formed her aching head's sweet resting-place; and so her grief over an unalterable past, and her vague nervous quailing from a shadowy and an unknown future, were alike assuaged by his nearness, his touch, his dear companionship alone, which soon would be a constant joy that was never more to be taken away!

Her lover, on that morning, since she had joined him in their sheltered resting-place among the gorse, had told her many strange and disquieting things, before explaining to her also his startling appearance at Dell Cottage in the dead of the past night.

He told Ivy that he had felt that he could not rest until with his own eyes he had beheld the interior of Daniel Moss's workshop, as the old man always called it.

As there appeared to be not the remotest chance of his—Ronald Dundas—entering the house by fair means—why, he must have recourse to means that, perhaps, were not exactly fair.

He explained to Ivy how simple a matter it was to scale the walls and roof of the old gray house in the hollow—remarkably easy, indeed, to a skilful climber like himself; described how he had found the skylight in the roof ajar, presumably for the sake of ventilation, and how he had at once lowered himself carefully into the small and stuffy den beneath it.

To his horror, the skylight had closed with a spring, the secret of which he had been unable to detect, and there was he amid the rafters of Dell Cottage—a prisoner—caught like a rat in a trap, laughed Ronald. "As I told you, my dear one, last night," added he.

"Oh, Ronald," whispered Ivy, woman-like, moved by curiosity, notwithstanding her sorrow and uneasiness, "what did you find, what did you see there? I want to know. Remember, I have never crossed the threshold of the roof-chamber in my life."

"I found, Ivy, plain tokens of—well, the old man's trade," was the rather grim reply.

"And they were—?" she breathed, clinging to him.

"My darling," spoke Ronald Dundas earnestly, "I do not want to alarm you unnecessarily; and you must have patience. After we are married you shall learn everything, or at any rate as much of the matter as I know myself. Let it suffice now that I consider Dell Cottage no fit abode for you; and you must exchange it, my dearest, for the best that it is within my power to offer you."

And then he went on to break to Ivy, gently, but very plainly, what it was that the Bleakferry people and the farmer folk at Breezy Point could tell concerning her; although, being so friendless, and so completely alone, Ivy herself had never heard the story.

She had, so it now would seem, quite sixteen years or more before, been brought home to Dell Cottage by Daniel Moss, a pretty little toddling dark-haired mite of nearly three years old, who—he had given out at the time—was the orphan baby daughter of his only son; a young man who had died abroad.

Nobody, however, had accepted the statement without question; for it was tolerably well-known in the neighbourhood of Bleakferry that Daniel Moss possessed no near relatives or connections other than his scraggy witch-faced wife, who lived with him at the cottage in the hollow on the downs.

Yes, Ivy herself was that self-same little child, it appeared, who had been brought so quietly no one knew whence, to be reared in loneliness and

the invigorating sea-coast air as the grandchild of Daniel Moss.

Hence, she supposed now, and told Ronald so the disagreeable curiosity her appearance never failed to excite whenever she had accompanied the old woman into the town of Bleakferry.

For was not she a creature of mystery? And was not Dell Cottage, where she dwelt, a lonely house, as it were, under a ban?

There was one thing, however, that her mysterious lover impressed vehemently upon her—the wisdom of getting their flight together well managed and over before Daniel Moss should return from his errand in London. And Ivy, because she loved him, believed all that he told her, and acquiesced, half-fearfully, in everything.

When they parted on that morning their plans for the immediate future were mapped out and settled. What they had to do must be done promptly, Ronald reiterated—there was no time to be lost.

So, like one moving in a dream, Ivy went back to the solitary house which for so long had been her home, but which thenceforward was to be her home never more in the future ahead!

For himself, Ronald Dundas hastened back to Breezy Point. He had, of course, a good deal to do—much to see to and arrange with regard to their flight, which was to take place even so early as at dawn on the following day.

They would not meet again until then; and they would be married in the registrar's office at Bleakferry.

At daybreak Ronald would contrive to be at Ivy's window; and she had promised to be ready. Waiting for them upon the downs, behind the cut-buildings, there would be a vehicle of some kind in which they could at once drive off together.

Ivy, had decreed her lover, was to take nothing with her from Dell Cottage beyond those things which might be absolutely necessary—as the garments, for instance, in which she stood upright. Because all that she possessed in the world had been bought with Daniel Moss's money; and that, declared Ronald Dundas proudly, was accursed money.

Anything that she might need later on he himself would buy for her, either in Bleakferry or in London; or even, should Ivy prefer it, in Paris—for to gay and lovely Paris were they going after spending a few days in the English capital.

So small wonder was it if Ivy's brain whirled, as people say, and she barely knew whether she was dreaming or awake!

Notwithstanding, when they said good-bye, Ivy had whispered, as he held her to his heart, with her arms lying round his neck:

"And—and after we are married, Ronald, you will try to find out, will you not, who I really am—who it is that you have made your wife? You will not let me live for ever, as it were, under a cloud, will you? For your own sake—for mine—you will do this thing?" pleaded Ivy.

And, with passionate assurances of his unchanging love, he promised her that he would do all she asked.

"We will tackle Daniel Moss himself," said Ronald Dundas, lightly and fondly, "after the honeymoon, shall we, sweetheart? The secret, we may be certain, lies with him."

CHAPTER VI.

FLIGHT.

AND so, like a woman moving in a dream, Ivy had gone slowly back to Dell Cottage. At dinner, the old woman said in her well-known querulous way,—

"You don't eat a morsel, Ivy; ain't you hungry after your walk?"

Therefore, with an effort, Ivy roused herself, and made a pretence of eating a little; although in reality to-day she had not the smallest appetite for the homely fare upon their table.

It was the last dinner which she would ever sit down to beneath that roof; yet, all the same, she could swallow no particle of it. Somehow it

seemed to Ivy then that she would never be hungry again!

When bed time came, hardly knowing what she was about to do or say, Ivy fell upon the grandmother's shoulder and sobbed out an inarticulate farewell. The old woman was evidently very much astonished at this unwonted display of emotion on Ivy's part, and said more kindly than her habit was,—

"Why, bless me, Ivy child, what's the matter with ye! You don't feel nervous or anything, like me, do you?" added the old creature, anxiously.

"No, no, no. I am weak and foolish—nothing more," Ivy stammered, drying her eyes quickly. "You see, I—I cannot help thinking about poor Pincher. I shall miss him so—so terribly—and—and—"

"Oh, that's all, is it?" said the old woman, in a tone of relief. "Well, it is rather silly to cry about it, Ivy. I buried him this afternoon."

Ivy, unable to bear or to say more just then, slipped from the old woman's stiff and queer but kindly-meant embrace; fled to her own chamber; locked the door; and flung herself upon the bed, weeping in spite of the happiness which filled her heart.

From sheer exhaustion, and worn out with suppressed excitement as she was, all dressed as she was, too, she quickly fell asleep, and slept, moreover, soundly.

But as the night wore on, she dreamed a frightful dream.

She thought that without warning Daniel Moss had returned to Dell Cottage, looking stern and menacing, and altogether unlike the benign old man she knew so well, to accuse her the moment they met of base ingratitude and lack of natural feeling.

He seemed to be aware that she was flying from the old house in the hollow on the downs; because he said, whilst his face grew wan with anger and a steel-like glitter crept into his eyes, that Ivy's conduct was unpardonable and more cruel than "a serpent's tooth."

In the dream, he dropped his hands upon her shoulders; and his wiry grip felt like the clutch of a skeleton.

Dumb with despair and horror, she sank at his feet; and she noticed then that he had his bundle from London with him.

He caught it up as if struck by a sudden idea; and something in his pale, evil look made Ivy gasp out,—

"Are you going to kill me?"

And he answered her quietly,—

"Yes—living you shall never leave Dell Cottage. I am going to kill you. I am going to stifle the life out of you with my heavy bundle here."

And in the next instant he seemed to be kneeling upon Ivy's chest, holding her down thus, with the heavy bundle pressed over her mouth and nostrils.

The horrid thing had a loathsome, deathlike smell, and she struggled frantically to thrust it from off her face.

Vain!

The agony of a violent end was stealing over her; the voice of Daniel Moss was humming in her ears.

"Ivy," it seemed to say, "good-bye, Ivy! I will bury you in the roof-chamber, and the ghosts there will keep you company . . . such grisly spectres, dear! Ivy—poor little Ivy—to die so early . . . Ivy!"

With a great start she awoke. The rose-gray light of dawn was in the room; and someone without her window was calling softly,—

"Ivy—Ivy!" and the thong of a whip was smiting her lattice.

Up sprang she—pushed back her tumbled hair and ran, all forgetful of her ugly dream, to the open casement.

Yes—it was new, fresh morning; young, lovely day; and the early dawn had restored to her her lover.

She leaned out over the window-ledge into the sweet chill air, stretching both hands towards him.

He grasped them and kissed them in gallant greeting.

"Ah, that is right!" said he gaily. "I see that you are up and dressed, and so we can start without the least delay. It is now about a quarter to four. I meant to have been even earlier, my darling, but I could not altogether manage it. It has been rather a rush as it is."

But Ivy told him that she had not really been to bed. She had been merely lying down with her clothes on; and in that fashion had fallen asleep unwittingly.

Ronald Dundas, however, struck in rather impatiently,—

"Yes, yes, darling, you shall tell me all about that driving along. Time's short; our breakfast is waiting us at Bleakferry. The old hag—that was the grandmother—" may wake up at any moment, you know; and then, Ivy, there'd be a scene—a denouement of a row perhaps—and we don't want that. Let us look sharp and be gone!"

"I will be ready in ten minutes, Ronald," Ivy promised, quickly.

"Ten minutes!" echoed he, frowning. "Why, what have you to do?"

"I must make myself tidy and nice," she answered timidly. "I—I feel rather confused and bewildered at present, waking so suddenly, but plenty of cold water will soon make me all right."

"Well, the cold water business will not take you long, Ivy," he threw in laughing. "Do be quick about it, dear, for I am getting hungry—fearfully hungry. It's the dawn breeze from the sea, I suppose."

"And I have to say my prayers too, Ronald," Ivy finished gently.

He laughed again heartily.

At any other time—a time that offered opportunity for, that invited calm and dispassionate reflection—the laugh would have jarred upon her, hurt her. For it is ever a bad sign when a man laughs at religion.

However, as it was, in the novelty and excitement of that fateful hour, his light regard of what, to Ivy, was so solemn and so true a thing, passed almost unnoticed by her.

"I'll give you ten minutes for everything," he said blithely. "And Ivy," he added, in a more serious tone, "recollect what I have told you. Bring nothing away with you from this house in the hollow, mind you, beyond the few things which are absolutely indispensable. All deficiencies can be made good by-and-by."

She assured him earnestly that no wish he had expressed on the subject had ever been forgotten by her.

His wishes were indeed commands, she told him, and should be obeyed to the last letter.

"Our chaise," said her lover, "is on the downs—just round the corner of that shed yonder. I'll go and see whether the horse is all right—we should be in a pickle if he were to bolt!—and will return here when the time is up."

Speaking, Mr. Dundas lit a cigar, strolled off on his errand, and Ivy withdrew from the lattice.

When the ten minutes given her were flown, she was ready. She had put on the best summer clothes in her possession; her sole luggage being an antiquated sunshade—a faded mauve silk one with a deep fringe and a handle that doubled up—and a small hand-bag.

She had taken a last fond lingering look at her hanging book shelves, and her framed texts, and then she had keelt by the side of her small white rumped bed, and in brief hurried prayer had asked passionately for Heaven's blessing upon the step she was about to take—the new life she was about to enter upon, her new strange unknown life as the wife of Ronald Dundas.

And then—and then, looking slowly round the narrow familiar room, every homely bit of furniture in which she can see before her mentally to-day as distinctly as if long and bitter years of suffering could not be counted by her between the present and the past—and then Ivy realised that there was, indeed, nothing more to be done.

She was ready; ready at last.

She went again to the open lattice, trembling now in every nerve.

Ronald Dundas, with outstretched arms, was awaiting her there on the sward below.

"Come, sweetheart!" said he.

"By this way—the window, Ronald—like this?" faltered Ivy.

"Yes. It is the simplest and the safest, after all," he replied. "Hand me down the bag and the sunshade; then take my hands firmly—and jump. I will catch you safely, dearest, never fear!"

She hesitated, and drew back a little.

"One moment, Ronald," she pleaded, half tearfully. "Do not—do not be angry with me; but—but I should like, if I may, to leave behind me some message—a written message—just a word or two, a few lines, for my grandfa—fa—fa— Oh, Ronald, you know what I mean!" she broke off tremulously, clasping her hands.

Ronald Dundas struck the ground with his foot, with something at the same time like an oath in his throat that nearly escaped into uttered words.

"What folly," he exclaimed, aloud, "what egregious folly! Why, Ivy—"

She stopped him with a piteous gesture of entreaty.

"Please," she whispered, "oh, please let me! It will not take long—do not forbid me, Ronald!"

Making no further objection on the point, he tore a leaf from a sketch-book he carried in his pocket, and scribbled upon it impatiently,—

"Daniel Moss, I have learned everything; and to-day at sunrise I am leaving Dell Cottage for ever. I have found someone who loves me truly, and whom I dearly love in return. His home, and not yours, will be my home henceforth."

"IVY DUNDAS."

"There," said her lover, coolly—"stick that, my darling, upon your pincushion. It will make the old couple stare."

Still Ivy hesitated, racked by many a doubt.

"It looks too—too cold and unfeeling," she objected, very wisely, reading with fast dimming eyes the lines that Ronald Dundas had written, "so cruelly brusque and ungrateful, somehow. And—and, besides, Ronald, I do not know everything yet. It is not the truth—"

"Oh, hang it—oh, that's nonsense, dear, I mean!" Surely you know enough, at any rate, for the present."

"And—and there's the signature. Oh, Ronald!"

"It's all right, my dear little girl. By the time the old ruffian comes home and reads that message of yours, why, you will of course be 'Ivy Dundas'—in fact, quite an old married woman!"

Ah, well, she had been called upon to choose between the two men, and she had elected to trust her future to the guardianship of Ronald Dundas!

Him she had chosen before all other men; thenceforward must she do his bidding—obey him—he was her lord and master.

His wishes, his will, now and for ever after, must be her own likewise.

With her head turned aside, so that her sad eyes might not witness the deed her trembling hands must so unwillingly perform, Ivy pinned upon her cushion on the dressing-table those cold lines of eternal farewell.

But in her heart she sobbed unrebuked.

"Oh, grandfather, after all, you were kind to me—good-bye! Good-bye!"

Then a few seconds later, with a poor forced little smile, Ivy assured her lover that she was ready—yes, really and truly, now, quite ready at last!

She climbed on to the broad stone window-ledge; put her hands into his; and then, gazing trustfully down into his dark and tender eyes, she sprang earthward fearlessly—to be caught safely on his breast, and within his strong and sheltering arms.

The chaise that was waiting for them upon the breezy downs was a somewhat dilapidated-looking vehicle, Ivy thought involuntarily.

However, said Ronald, gaily, it was the best he could procure in the neighbourhood; and the

rather lean animal attached to it—with no thoughts of bolting, Ivy felt sure—was cropping tranquilly the sweet and dewy herbage.

The sun was waxing stronger; the larks were singing out of sight; upon the far uplands the heather amid the chalk took faint crimson and purple hues when viewed through the vanishing morning mists.

Ivy was seated by the side of Ronald Dundas. She was very silent.

She dared not look back at the old gray house in the hollow—the home she had forsaken in flight.

Had she done well or ill?

Ronald gathered up the reins; gave the horse a sharp sting with the whip—they were off!

"Ah!" cried he suddenly, stooping and taking from beneath the seat of the musty old chaise a handful of lovely real orange flowers, "ah, I ought to have remembered these before! They are for you. See, sweetheart—fasten them at your throat and waist. They will become you infinitely to-day."

For a moment or two, in a dazed, unseeing way, Ivy stared at the exquisite blossoms in her lap. And for a moment or two longer she failed utterly to realise their tender and deep significance.

In truth, their rare and almost unearthly fragrance had turned her somewhat giddy and sick.

Ronald touched the beautiful flowers on her lap, and passed his arm around Ivy's waist.

Fondly he drew her to his side, and bent his dark head to Ivy's.

She clung to him helplessly—in a passion of love—he was all the world to her now. In it she had no one else!

"What, sweet Ivy! is it possible that you can have forgotten," whispered Ronald Dundas, "that this is our wedding-morn?"

Then once more uprose in her breast the torturing question—Had she done well or ill?

Time alone could show.

(To be continued.)

AN EVENTFUL MEETING.

—3—

To marry well was Kitty Deahon's destiny. It was what she was born for, as you might say. At any rate, she had had it dinned in her pretty, rosy ears from almost her lovely cradlehood till she believed it herself—in theory, at least.

But, like the rest of us, Kitty had a sort of double identity.

The Kitty that was to marry well loved silks and satins, laces and jewellery, and was to live in a magnificent mansion, with troops of servants and carriages at command.

The other Kitty was a romantic, sentimental little puss, who thought handsome young gentlemen with expressive dark eyes, and soft, low, eloquent voices, were worth all the fine clothes and other trifles between the two oceans.

It was somebody very much after this description that Kitty was talking to in the park, a few days before the grand party at which she was to make her debut upon the stage of fashionable life.

For Kitty was only just now home from her boarding-school, where she had been "finished" in the most approved style.

The pair were both laughing—Kitty, with a wild rose flush in her cheeks and a dewy light in her beautiful eyes, that did not always shine there; the young fellow with a look of adoration in his handsome hazel orbs for which the laughter was only a well-concealed mask.

This was not the first time the two had met. Kitty had seen him first in the train, as she was coming home from her boarding-school. She had lost her railway ticket, and was wondering what in the world she should do, when up stepped a handsome, manly-looking young fellow, with these very laughing, hazel eyes, and the ticket, which he had picked up on the seat behind her.

Then he opened the window for her and lent her a new magazine, and—and that is how they got acquainted.

They had met half a dozen times since by the purest accident—certainly on Kitty's part, though she had got into the habit of listening for a certain light, brisk step, and blushing beautifully, without knowing it, when she heard it.

"I assure you, grandfather, I have never spoken one word to the young lady but that you, her mother, or any one, might have heard and welcome."

"You rascal!" cried the old man. "Do you mean to tell me she don't know you're in love with her?"

"I mean to say that I have never told her so in words."

"Oh, you haven't? Oh, ho, ho! Yet you think she knows it?"

"Yes, sir."

"And that she would have you?"

"I believe that she loves me as I do her."

"And she thinks you only a poor law student?"

"I told her I was studying, sir, and that I meant to practice."

"And you have never given her a hint that you were the grandson and probable heir of old Douglas McLean, who could buy out a train load of such men as her precious papa?"

"She heard some of the fellows call me St. Remys, and she took it for my surname. That was all, sir. I had no thought of concealing anything, except at first for a jest. She seemed to like 'St. Remys' so; and afterward I did not feel somehow like trumpeting my relationship to you."

"Certainly not—certainly not," said the old man, slowly and approvingly. "You've been a good boy in most things, Angus, lad—docile and obedient, taking the old grandfather's advice, and finding it always for your advantage—eh, lad?"

Angus McLean threw up his handsome head brightly.

"Yes, sir, always."

"Well, then, my boy, here is one more time to obey the old man without question, and it will come harder than all the others."

"Yes, sir," paled a little.

"You are not to see or speak to this young lady again till I tell you so may."

"Y-e-s, sir," more slowly and with an uneasy smile. "How long will it be first?"

"I can't tell you," returned the old gentleman, watching him from under his snow-white, shaggy eyebrows. "You think this girl is the genuine stuff, I don't. We shall see."

There was a silence of some moments; then Angus said,—

"I will promise you this, grandfather. I will not go near Miss Deahon without telling you first. I don't know what she will think of me, though. You must not keep me from her too long."

Such a funny little old man! Immaculately neat, extraordinarily polite, wonderfully ugly. A diamond glittering on one white, small hand, a gold snuff-box in the other—decidedly a man worth looking at in spite of his ugliness, or partly because of that.

His little black eyes were as bright and flashing as the diamond on his finger. And his long, aquiline nose and his sharp-pointed chin, if they did not meet, came very near it.

It was at her own house that Kitty first met this funny little old gentleman—on the evening of her party—and took such a fancy to him, in spite of his ugliness, as to make all the young fellows in the room crazy with jealousy.

Kitty was an immense success. She took everybody by storm by her exceeding loveliness, her flower-like and gentle sweetness, her frank and enchanting gaiety.

But most of all she captivated the heart of this old gentleman, who was called Douglas McLean in his own world "the Stock Exchange."

His wonderful bright, black eyes followed her everywhere she moved, and when she stopped to

chat and laugh with him, in a pretty bird-like fashion, letting him see in every glance of her innocent, liquid eyes, that she liked him, and approved of him, and thought he was nice, he glowed under it, as some old frost-bound rock will sparkle in the sun.

"You make me think so much of some one I know," she said to him, simply, once in the evening.

"Ah?" he questioned, the black eyes twinkling from under the snow-white brows. "You mean a Mr. St. Remys, I presume. I have been told there was a resemblance."

"Yes that is the name," said Kitty, with an enchanting affectation of carelessness. "Do you know him?"

"Slightly, slightly," nodded the old gentleman. "Young law student. Handsome dog. Don't look so much like ugly me as I do like handsome him, eh?"

Kitty blushed and hung her pretty head a little.

"I—I think you are both very nice-looking, sir."

McLean grinned very broadly at this, and seemed more enraptured than ever with Kitty, till everybody in the room noticed it.

"The old fellow is caught at last," said one.

"You don't think she'd have him?"

"Why not—with all that money?"

Kitty's papa, seeing and hearing, caught his breath at thought of what it might mean.

"It would be an awful thing, Gilbert—an awful thing," answered his wife, when he told her next day of his thought.

"An awful thing?" almost screamed Deahon. "Why, he's worth millions!"

"Yes, I suppose he is," said Mrs. Deahon; "but such a horrible old man, and Kitty such a baby. If it were the grandson, now."

"The grandson is spoken for. He did not come to the party. It would be a wonderful thing for Kitty and for us. His age is nothing."

Before the week was out, Douglas McLean made formal proposals for the hand of Miss Kitty Deahon.

Her father said "Yes" at once, and almost "thank you."

Her mother even was dazzled. The old man was such a money king.

There remained one more person—Kitty herself—to be consulted, or rather informed of the fate in store for her.

For Mr. Deahon was so excited and exultant over the prospect of having a *Cicero* for a son-in-law that he had set his face like a flint in the matter. Kitty was to have no voice in it at all.

Kitty's face, when told what was expected of her, was a sight. Her big eyes widened—her dimples deepened. She almost did laugh, but not quite, because of her father's looks.

"You cannot surely mean it, papa!" she said. "You must have misunderstood Mr. McLean. He could never want me for a wife."

"I have not misunderstood, and I told him yes. You'll be the envy of every woman in the town, Kitty."

Kitty grew suddenly very white, and looked so frightened that Mrs. Deahon began to cry.

"Mr. McLean is coming here this morning. You must look your prettiest," said Mr. Deahon to his daughter.

And he hurried from the room.

Kitty did not answer him.

"Kitty," said her mother, when her husband had been gone some time, "why don't you say something? Are you glad you are going to marry Mr. McLean?"

"No!"

Kitty's little locked mouth just opened to say that, and shut up tight again.

"But you will have to do it," said her mother. "You know what your father is when he sets out, and he is bent on this."

Yes, Kitty knew how stern and unrelenting her father could be on occasion. She was thinking it all over.

Douglas McLean made his appearance promptly at the appointed time, and Kitty went down obediently to see him.

She would not let her mother go in with her, and when her father had led her in, and put her

hand in old McLean's, she asked him to leave them.

But Gilbert Deshon hesitated. There was something in Kitty's eyes that he had never seen there before.

But McLean whispered, "Yes, yes, go!" and he went.

Kitty was alone with her aged suitor. She was trembling, and her eyes looked as if she could hardly keep from crying. But she spoke in quite a resolute little voice.

"Mr. McLean, papa says you have asked him if you may marry me, and he has told you yes. But I do not wish to be your wife, sir. I have not told papa; I thought I would speak to you yourself. I am very sorry you ever thought of such a thing. I liked you so much, but if I was married to you I should hate the very sight of you!"

"Frank!" chuckled the old fellow to himself. Then to Kitty.

"I don't see why, my dear. You shall never have a wish ungratified—jewels, dresses, parties, everything that girls like you care for."

"That is not all we care for," said Kitty, firmly. "I thought it was once, but I know better now."

"I believe you are in love with that young scamp St. Remys," said McLean, with a fine show of indignation. "He's not worth his salt, I assure you, Kitty."

"Stop!" said Kitty, her eyes flashing. "How do you know I'm in love with him? You shan't abuse him to me, anyway."

"Well, he's in love with you. I can say that, I suppose? Had the impudence to ask me to speak a good word for him. I told him it was of no use; I had the promise of your hand for myself."

"But it is of use!" broke in Kitty, angrily. "I never promised you. How dare you say such a thing!"

"You don't mean to tell me you'd marry a young renegade like that, without a penny to his name, when you could have me!"

"Yes, I would, if papa would consent!" cried Kitty, bursting into tears. "I had rather a million times over. I'd be willing to live on crusts. And he's not a renegade, either!"

Douglas McLean coolly stepped to one of the windows and signalled slightly to someone sitting in his carriage outside.

Almost instantly the door-bell rang, and the "some one" in question was ushered into the drawing-room, smiling and blushing, gallant, handsome as a young Adonis.

"Miss Kitty Deshon," said McLean, politely. "permit me to present to you my grandson, Angus St. Remys McLean. Angus, Miss Deshon has the bad taste to prefer some one else to me for a husband. See if you can find out who it is."

And he left the room.

It is, perhaps, needless to say that the young people were not long in coming to an understanding, and that Kitty's father and mother had no objections to make.

NEW ZEALAND has set apart two islands for the preservation of its remarkable wild birds and other animals. Thereon all hunting and trapping are forbidden.

THE black apes of Guinea have long, silky hair, and their fur is admired for muffs and capes. Each skin brings from 4s. to 12s. During the past eight years 1,075,000 skins have been shipped to Paris.

CHILDREN from eight to fifteen years of age are employed in the sulphur mines of Gaitanetza, Sicily, to carry the sulphur to the surface of the earth. The occupation is very unhealthy, and the children, after two or three years of service, are physical wrecks.

THE average production of ice, by means of the expansion of cold air, in what are known as cold air machines, is two and one-half tons of ice per ton of coal. Other machines vary from two and one-half tons to twelve and one-half tons of ice per ton of coal.

A SISTER'S REVENGE.

—30:—

CHAPTER I.

THE day was fast drawing to a close; the heat had been almost intolerable under the rays of the piercing sun, and the night was coming on in sullen sultriness.

No breath of cooling air stirred the leafy branches of the trees; the stillness was broken only by the chirping of the crickets.

On one of the largest estates in the South there was a great stir of excitement; the master, Miles Stanton, was momentarily expected home with his bride. The servants, in their best attire, were scattered in anxious groups here and there, watching eagerly for the first approach of their master's carriage on the white pebbled road.

The curtains of Stanton Hall were looped back, and a cheerful flood of light shone on the waving fields that stretched out like a field of snow as far as the eye could reach. The last touches had been given to the pillars of roses that filled every available nook and corner, making the summer air redolent with their odorous perfumes.

Mrs. Martin, who had maintained the position of housekeeper for a score of years or more, stood at the window twisting with ill-concealed impatience the telegram she held in her hand. The announcement of his home-coming had been as unexpected as the news of his marriage had been almost a year before.

"Let there be no guests assembled; my reasons will be made apparent to you later on," so read the telegram, which puzzled the housekeeper more than she cared to admit to the inquisitive maid who stood near her curiously watching her thoughtful face.

"It seems to me as if it will rain afore they get here, Martha," she said, nervously; and, as if in confirmation of her words, a few rain-drops splashed against the window-pane.

Both stood gazing intently out into the darkness. The storm had now commenced in earnest. The great trees bent to and fro like reeds before the wind, the lightning flashed, and the terrific crash of roaring thunder mingled with the torrent of rain that now beat furiously against the casement. It seemed as if the very flood-gates of heaven were flung open wide on this memorable night of the master's return.

"It is a fearful night! Ah! happy is the bride upon whose home-coming the sunlight falls," muttered Mrs. Martin under her breath.

Martha had caught the low-spoken words, and in a voice that sounded strange and weird like a warning, she answered,—

"Yes, and unhappy is the bride upon whose home-coming rain-drops fall."

How little they knew, as they stood there, of the terrible tragedy—the cruellest ever enacted—the grim, silent walls of Stanton Hall were soon to witness, in fulfilment of the strange prophecy.

Martha, the maid, had scarcely ceased speaking ere the door was flung violently open, and a child of some ten summers rushed into the room, her face livid with passion, and her dark, gleaming eyes shining like baleful stars, before which the two women involuntarily quailed.

"What is this I hear!" she cried, with wild energy, glancing fiercely from one to the other. "Is it true what they tell me—my father is bringing home his bride!"

"Lena, my child," remonstrated Mrs. Martin, feebly, "I—"

"Don't Lena me!" retorted the child, clutching the deep crimson passion-roses from a vase at her side, and trampling them ruthlessly beneath her feet. "Answer me at once, I say—has he dared do it?"

"Lena!" Mrs. Martin advances toward her, but the child turns her darkly beautiful, wilful face toward her with an imperious gesture.

"Do not come a step nearer," cried the child, bitterly, "or I shall fling myself from the window down on the rocks below! I shall never welcome my father's wife here; and mark me, both of you, I hate her!" she cried, vehemently. "She shall rue the day she was born!"

Mrs. Martin knew but too well the child would keep her word.

No power, save Heaven's, could stay the turbulent current of the ungovernable self-will which would drag her on to her doom.

No human being could hold in subjection the fierce, untamed will of the beautiful youthful tyrant.

There had been strange rumours of the unhappiness of Miles Stanton's former marriage.

No one remembered having seen his wife but once, five years before. A beautiful woman with a little child had suddenly appeared at the Hall, announcing herself as Miles Stanton's wife.

There had been a fierce, stormy interview, and on that very night Miles Stanton took his wife and child abroad.

Those who had once seen the dark, glorious scornful beauty of the woman's face never forgot it.

Two years later the master had returned alone with the little child, heavily draped in widower's weeds.

The master of the Hall was young; those who knew his story were not surprised that he should marry—he could not go through life alone; still, they felt a nameless pity for the young wife who was to be brought to the home in which dwelt the child of his former wife.

There would be bitter war between them. No one could tell on which side the scales of mercy and justice would be balanced.

At that instant, through the raging of the fierce elements, the sound of carriage wheels smote upon their ears as the vehicle dashed rapidly up the long avenue to the porch; while, in another instant, the young master, half carrying the slight delicate figure that clung timidly to his arm, hurriedly entered the spacious parlour.

There was a hurried consultation with the housekeeper, and Miles Stanton, tenderly lifting the alight burden in his strong, powerful arms, quickly bore his wife to the beautiful apartments that had been prepared for her.

In the excitement of the moment Lena had been quite forgotten.

For an instant only she glanced bitterly at the sweet, fair face resting against her father's shoulder, framed in a mass of golden hair.

The child clutched her small hands until she almost cried aloud with the intense pain, never once deigning a glance at her father's face.

In that one instant the evil deeds of a lifetime were sown strong as life and more bitter than death.

Turning hastily aside, she sprang hastily down the long corridor, and out into the darkness and the storm, never stopping to gain breath until she had reached the great gate that shut in the garden from the dense thicket that skirted the southern portion of the plantation.

She laughed a hard, mocking laugh that sounded unnatural from such childish lips, as she saw a white hand hurriedly loop back the silken curtains of the window and saw her father bend tenderly over the golden-haired figure in the arm-chair. Suddenly the sound of her own name fell upon her ear.

"Lena," whispered a low cautious voice; and in the quick flashes of lightning she saw a woman's white, haggard face pressed close against the grating, and two white hands were steadily forcing the rusty lock. There was no fear in the fiery, rebellious heart of the dauntless child.

"Go away, you miserable beggar-woman," she cried, "or I shall set the hounds on you at once. Do you hear me, I say!"

"Who are you?" questioned the woman, in the same low, guarded voice.

The child threw her head back proudly, her voice rising shrilly above the warring of the elements, as she answered,—

"Know, then, I am Lena, the heiress of Stanton Hall."

The child formed a strange picture—her dark, wild face, so strangely like the mysterious woman's, standing vividly out against the crimson lightning flashes, her dark curls blown about the gipsy-like face, her red lips curling scornfully, her dark eyes gleaming.

"Lena," called the woman, softly, "come here."

"How dare you, a beggar-woman, call me!" cried the child, furiously.

"Lena—come here instantly!"

There was a subtle something in the stranger's voice that throbbled through the child's pulses like leaping fire—a strange, mysterious influence that bound her, heart and soul, like the mesmerist influence a serpent exerts over a fascinated dove.

Slowly, hesitatingly, this child, whose fiery will had never bowed before human power, came timidly forward, step by step, to the iron gate against which the woman's face was pressed.

She stretched out her hand, and it rested for a moment on the child's dark curls.

"Lena, the gate is locked," she said. "Do you know where the keys are?"

"No," answered the child.

"They used to hang behind the pantry-door—a great bunch of them. Don't they hang there now?"

"Yes—es."

"I thought so," muttered the woman, triumphantly. "Now, listen, Lena; I want you to do exactly as I bid you. I want you to go quickly and quietly, and bring me the longest and thinnest one. You are not to breathe one word of this to any living soul. Do you understand, child? I command you to do it."

"Yes," answered the child, dubiously.

"Stay!" she called, as the child was about to turn from her. "Why is the house lighted up to-night?"

Again the reckless spirit of the child flashed forth.

"My father has brought home his bride," she said. "Don't you see him bending over her at the third window yonder?"

The woman's eyes quickly followed in the direction indicated.

Was it a curse the woman uttered as she watched the fair, golden-haired young girl-wife's head resting against Miles Stanton's breast, his arms clasped lovingly about her?

"Go, Lena!" she commanded, bitterly.

Quickly and cautiously the child sped on her fatal errand through the storm and the darkness. A moment later she had returned with the key which was to unlock a world of misery to so many lives.

"Promise me, Lena, heiress of Stanton Hall, never to tell what you have done or seen or heard to-night. You must never dare breathe it while you live. Say you will never tell, Lena!"

"No," cried the child, "I shall never tell. They may kill me, but I will never tell them."

The next moment she was alone. Stunned and bewildered she turned her face slowly toward the house.

The storm did not abate in its fury; night-birds flapped their wings through the storm overhead; owls shrieked in the distance from the swaying tree-tops; yet the child walked slowly home, knowing no fear.

In the house lights were moving to and fro, the servants, with bated breath and light footfalls, hurried through the long corridors towards Lena's room.

No one seemed to notice her in her dripping robe, creeping slowly along by their side toward her own little chamber.

It was midnight when her father sent for her. Lena suffered him to kiss her, giving back no answering caresses.

"I have brought some one to you, my darling," he said. "See, Lena—a new mamma! And see who else—a wee, dimpled little sister, with golden hair like mamma's, and great blue eyes. Little Brenda is your sister, dear. Lena must love her new mamma and sister for papa's sake."

The dark frown on the child's face never relaxed, and with an impatient gesture her father ordered her to be taken from the room.

Suddenly the great bells ceased peeling for the joyous birth of Miles Stanton's daughter, and the bitter cries of a strong man in mortal anguish rent the air.

No one had noticed how or when the sweet, golden-haired young wife had died. With a smile

on her lips, she was dead, with her tiny little darling pressed close to her pulseless heart.

But sorrow even as pitiful as death but rarely travels singly. Dear Heaven! how could they tell the broken-hearted man, who wept in such agony beside the wife he had loved so well, of another mighty sorrow that had fallen upon him?

Who was there that could break the news to him? The tiny, fair-haired infant had been stolen from their midst. They would have thanked Heaven if it had been lying cold in death upon its mother's bosom.

Slowly throughout the long night—that terrible night that was never to be forgotten—the solemn bells pealed forth from the turrets of Stanton Hall, echoing in their sound, "Unhappy is the bride the rain falls on." Most truly had been the fulfilment of that fearful prophecy!

"Merciful Heaven!" cried Mrs. Martin, "how shall I break the news to my master! The sweet little babe is gone!"

For answer Martha bent quickly over her, and breathed a few words in her ear that caused her to cry out in horror and amazement.

"No one will ever know," whispered Martha; "it is the wisest course. The truth will lie buried in our own hearts, and die with us."

Six weeks from the night his golden-haired wife had died Miles Stanton awoke to consciousness from the ravages of brain-fever—awoke to a life not worth the living. Quickly Mrs. Martin was sent for, and soon entered the room, leaning upon Martha's arm.

"My wife is——" He could not say more.

"Buried, sir, beneath yonder willow."

"And the babe!" he cried, eagerly.

"Dead," answered Martha, softly. "Both are buried in one grave."

Miles Stanton turned his face to the wall, with a bitter groan.

Heaven forgive them! the seeds of the bitterest of tragedies were irrevocably sown.

CHAPTER II.

ONE bright May morning some sixteen years later the golden sunshine was just putting forth its first crimson rays, lighting up the ivy-grown turrets of Stanton Hall, and shining upon a little white cottage nestling in a bower of green leaves far to the right of it, where dwelt George Meadows, the farmer on the Stanton estate.

For sixteen years the grand old house had remained closed—the plantation being placed in charge of a careful overseer. Once again the Hall was thrown open to welcome its master, Miles Stanton, who had returned from abroad, bringing with him his beautiful daughter and a party of friends.

The interior of the little cottage was astir with activity.

It was five o'clock, the chimneys had played the hour; the labourers were going to the fields, and the dairy-maids were beginning their work.

In the door-way of the cottage stood a tall, angular woman, shading her flushed and heated face from the sun's rays with her hand.

"Madge, Madge!" she calls in a harsh, rasping voice, "where are you, you good-for-nothing lazy girl? Come into the house directly, I say!" Her voice died away over the white stretches of waving cotton, but no Madge came. "Here's a pretty go," she cried, turning into the room where her brother sat calmly finishing his morning meal, "a pretty go, indeed! I promised Miss Lena those white mulls should be sent over to her the first thing in the morning. She will be in a towering rage, and no wonder, and like enough you'll lose your place, George Meadows, and 'twill serve you right, too, for encouraging that lazy girl in her idleness."

"Don't be too hard on little Madge, Annie," answered George Meadows, timidly, reaching for his hat. "She will have the dresses at the Hall in good time, I'll warrant."

"Too hard, indeed; that's just like you men, no feeling for your poor, overworked sister, so long as that girl has an easy life of it. It was a sorry

day for me when your sundried leaving this girl to our care."

A deep flush mantled George Meadows's face, but he made no reply, while Ann energetically piled the white fluted laces in the huge basket—piled it full to the top, until her arm ached with the weight of it—the basket which was to play such a fatal part in the transient Madge's life—the life which for sixteen short years had been so monotonous.

Over the corn-fields came a young girl tripping lightly along.

George Meadows paused in the path as he caught sight of her.

"Poor, innocent little Madge!" he muttered half under his breath as he gazed at her.

Transferred to canvas, the picture would have immortalized a painter. No wonder the man's heart softened as he gazed. He saw a glitter of golden curls, and the gleam of a scarlet mantle—a young girl, tall and slender, with rounded, supple limbs, and a figure graceful in every line and curve, while her arms, bare to the elbow, would have charmed a sculptor. Cheek and lips were a glowing rosy red, while her eyes, of the deepest and darkest blue, were the merriest that ever gazed up to the summer sky.

Suddenly from over the trees there came the sound of the great bell at the Hall. Madge stood quite still in alarm.

"It is five o'clock!" she cried. "What shall I do! Aunt Ann will be so angry with me; she promised Miss Lena her white dresses should be at the Hall by five, and it is that already."

Poor little Madge! no wonder her heart throbbed painfully and the look of fear deepened in her blue eyes as she sped rapidly up the path that led to the little cottage where Ann grimly awaited her with flushed face and flashing eyes.

"So," she said, harshly, "you are come at last, are you! and a pretty fright you have given me! You shall answer to Miss Lena *herself* for this. I dare say you will never attempt to offend her a second time."

"Indeed, Aunt Ann, I never dreamed it was so late," cried Madge. "I was watching the sun rise over the cotton-fields, and watching the dew drops glittering on the corn, thinking of the beautiful heiress of Stanton Hall. I am so sorry I forgot about the dresses."

Hastily catching up the heavy basket, she hurried quickly down the path, like a startled deer, to escape the volley of wrath the indignant spinster hurled after her.

It was a beautiful morning, no cloud was in the smiling heavens; the sun shone brightly, and the great oak and cedar-trees that skirted the roadside seemed to thrill with the song of birds. Butterflies spread their light wings and coquetted with the fragrant blossoms, and busy humming-bees buried themselves in the heart of the crimson wild roses. The basket was very heavy, and poor little Madge's arms ached with the weight of it.

"If I might but rest for a few moments only," she said to herself, eyeing the cool, shady grass by the roadside. "Surely a moment or two will not matter. Oh, dear, I am so tired!"

She set the basket down on the cool, green grass, flinging herself beside it beneath the grateful shade of a blossoming chestnut-tree, resting her golden head against the basket of fluted laces that were to adorn the beautiful heiress of whom she had heard so much, yet never seen, and of whom every one felt in so much awe.

She looked wistfully at the great mansion in the distance, thinking how different her own life had been.

The soft, wooing breeze fanned her cheeks and tossed about her golden curls in wanton sport. It was so pleasant to sit there in the dreamy silence, watching the fleecy white clouds, the birds, and the flowers; it was little wonder the swift-winged moments flew heedlessly by.

Slowly the white lids drooped over the dark-blue eyes; the long, golden lashes lay against the rosy cheeks, the red lips parted in a smile; all unheeded were the fluted laces. Madge slept.

Oh, cruel breeze! oh, fatal wooing breeze, to have enfolded hapless Madge in your soft embrace!

Over the hills came the sound of baying hounds,

followed by a quick, springy step through the crackling underbrush, as a young man, in close-fitting velvet hunting-suit and jaunty velvet cap, emerged from the thicket toward the main road.

As he parted the chestnut branches, the hound, with a low, hoarse growl, sprang quickly forward at some object beneath the tree.

"Down, Tiger, down!" cried Duncan Field, leaping lightly over some intervening brushwood. "What kind of game have we here! Whew!" he ejaculated, surprisedly; "a young girl, as pretty as a picture, and, by the eternal, fast asleep, too!"

Still Madge slept on, utterly unconscious of the handsome brown eyes that were regarding her so admiringly.

"I have often heard of fairies, but this is the first time I ever caught one napping under the trees. I wonder who she is, anyhow! Surely she cannot be a drudging farmer's daughter, with a form and face like that," he mused, suspiciously eyeing the basket of freshly-laundered laces, against which the flushed cheeks and waving golden hair rested.

Just then his ludicrous position struck him forcibly.

"Come, Tiger," he said; "it would never do for you and me to be caught staring at this pretty wood-nymph so rudely, if she should by chance awaken."

Tightening the strap of his game-bag over his shoulder, and readjusting his velvet cap jauntily over his brown curls, Duncan was about to resume his journey in the direction of the Hall, when the sound of rapidly approaching carriage-wheels fell upon his ears.

Realizing his awkward position, Duncan knew the wisest course he could possibly pursue would be to screen himself behind the chestnut branches until the vehicle should pass.

The next instant a pair of prancing ponies, attached to a basket phaeton in which sat a young girl who held them well in check, dashed rapidly up the road.

Duncan could scarcely repress an exclamation of surprise as he saw the occupant was his young hostess, Lena Stanton.

She drew rein directly in front of the sleeping girl, and Duncan Field, to his dying day, never forgot the discordant laugh that broke from her red lips—a laugh which caused poor Madge to start from her slumber in wild alarm, and scatter the snowy contents of the basket in all directions.

For a single instant their eyes met—these two girls whose lives were to cross each other so strangely—poor Madge, like a frightened bird, as she guessed intuitively at the identity of the other. Lena, haughty, derisive, and scornfully mocking.

"You are the person whom Miss Meadows sent to the Hall with my mull dresses, some three hours since, I presume. May I ask what detained you?"

Poor Madge was quite crestfallen; great tears trembled on her long lashes. How could she answer!

Wooded by the lulling breeze and the sunshine, she had fallen asleep.

"The basket was so heavy," she answered, timidly; "and I—I—sat down to rest a few moments, and—"

"Further explanation is quite unnecessary," retorted Lena, sharply, gathering up the reins. "See that you have those things at the Hall within ten minutes—not an instant later."

Touching the prancing ponies with her ivory-handled whip, the haughty young heiress whirled down the road, leaving Madge, with flushed face and tear-dimmed eyes, gazing after her.

"Oh, dear, I wish I had never been born!" she sobbed, flinging herself down on her knees and burying her face in the long cool grass. "No one ever speaks a kind word to me but poor Uncle George, and even he dare not be kind when Aunt Ann is near. She might have taken this heavy basket in her carriage," sighed Madge, bravely lifting the heavy burden in her delicate arms.

"That is just what I think," muttered Duncan

Field, from his place of concealment, savagely biting his lip.

In another moment he was by her side. "Pardon me," he said, deferentially raising his cap from his glossy curls; "that basket is too heavy for your slender arms. Allow me to assist you."

In a moment the young girl stood up and made the prettiest and most graceful of courtesies, as she raised to his a face he never forgot. Involuntarily he again raised his cap in homage to her youth and shy, sweet beauty.

"No, I thank you, sir; I have not far to carry the basket," she replied in a voice sweet as the chiming of silver bells—a voice that thrilled him, he could not tell why.

A sudden desire possessed Duncan to know who she was and from whence she came.

"Do you live at the Hall?" he asked.

"No," she replied, "I am Madge Meadows, the overseer's niece."

"Madge Meadows," said Duncan, musingly. "What a pretty name; how well it suits you."

He watched the crimson blushes that dyed her fair young face—she never once raised her dark blue eyes to his.

The more Duncan looked at her the more he admired this coy, bewitching pretty little maiden.

She made a fair picture under the boughs of the chestnut-tree, thick with odoriferous blossoms, the sunbeams falling on her golden hair.

The sunshine or the gentle southern wind brought Duncan no warning that he was forging the first links of a dreadful tragedy.

He thought only of the shy blushing beauty and coy grace of the young girl—he never dreamed of the hour when he should look back to that moment, wondering at his own blind folly, with a curse on his lips.

Again from over the trees came the sound of the great bell from the Hall.

"It is eight o'clock," cried Madge in alarm. "Miss Lena will be so angry with me!"

"Angry," said Duncan, "angry with you! What for?"

"She is waiting for the mull dresses," replied Madge.

It was a strange idea to him that any one should dare be angry with this pretty gentle Madge.

"You will at least permit me to carry your basket as far as the gate," he said, shouldering her burden without waiting for a reply.

Madge had no choice but to follow him.

"There," said Duncan, setting the basket down by the plantation gate, which they had reached all too soon, "you must go, I suppose. It seems hard to leave the bright sunshine to go indoors."

"I—I shall soon return," said Madge, with innocent frankness.

"Shall you?" cried Duncan. "Will you return home by the same path?"

"Yes," she replied, "if Miss Lena does not need me."

"Good-bye, Madge," he said. "I shall see you again."

He held out his hand, and her little fingers trembled and fluttered in his clasp. Madge looked so happy yet so frightened, so charming yet so shy, Duncan hardly knew how to define the feeling that stirred in his heart.

He watched the graceful, fairy figure as Madge tripped away, instead of thinking he had done a very foolish thing that bright morning.

Duncan lighted a cigar and fell to dreaming of sweet little Madge Meadows, and wondering how he should pass the time until he should see her again.

While Madge almost flew up the broad gravel path to the house—the heavy burden she bore seemed light as a feather—no thought that she had been imprudent ever entered her mind.

There was no one to warn her of the peril which lay in the witching depths of the handsome stranger's eyes.

All her young life she had dreamed of the hero who would one day come to her—just such a dream as all youthful maidens experience—an idol they enshrine in their innermost hearts, and

worship in secret, never dreaming of a cold, dark time when the idol may lie shattered in ruins at their feet.

How little knew gentle Madge Meadows of the fatal love which would drag her down to her doom!

CHAPTER III.

In an elegant boudoir, all crimson and gold, some hours later sat Lena Stanton reclining negligently on a satin divan, toying idly with a volume which lay in her lap.

She tossed the book aside with a yawn, turning her superb dark eyes on the little figure bending over the rich trailing silks which were to adorn her own fair beauty on the coming evening.

"So you think you would like to attend the lawn fête to-night, Madge?" she asked patronizingly.

Madge glanced up with a startled blush.

"Oh, I should like it so much, Miss Lena," she answered hesitatingly, "if I only could."

"I think I shall gratify you," said Lena carelessly. "You have made yourself very valuable to me. I like the artistic manner in which you have twined these roses in my hair; the effect is quite picturesque."

She glanced approvingly at her magnificent reflection in the cheval glass opposite. Titian alone could have reproduced those rich, marvellous colours—that perfect, queenly beauty.

He would have painted the picture, and the world would have raved about its beauty. The dark masses of raven-black hair; the proud, haughty face, with its warm southern tints; the dusky eyes, lighted with fire and passion, and the red, curved lips.

"I wish particularly to look my very best to-night, Madge," she said; "that is why I wish you to remain. You can arrange those sprays of white heath in my hair. Then you shall attend the fête, Madge. Remember, you are not expected to take part in it; you must sit in some secluded nook where you will be quite unobserved."

Lena could not help but smile at the ardent delight depicted in Madge's face.

"I am afraid I cannot stay," she said, doubtfully, glancing down in dismay at the pink and white muslin she wore. "Every one would be sure to laugh at me who saw me. Then I should wish I had not stayed."

"Suppose I should give you one to wear—that white mull, for instance—how would you like it? None of the guests would see you," replied Lena.

There was a wistful look in Madge's eyes, as though she would fain believe what she heard was really true.

"Would you really?" asked Madge, wonderingly. "You, whom people call so haughty and so proud—you would really let me wear one of your dresses? I do not know how to tell you how much I am pleased!" she said, eagerly.

Lena Stanton laughed. Such rapture was new to her.

The night which drew its mantle over the smiling earth was a perfect one. Myriads of stars shone like jewels in the blue sky, and not a cloud obscured the face of the clear full moon.

The grounds were ablaze with coloured lamps that threw out soft rainbow tints in all directions as far as the eye could reach. The interior of Stanton Hall was simply dazzling in its rich rose bloom, its lights, its fountains, and rippling music from adjoining ferries.

In an elegant apartment of the Hall Miles Stanton, the recluse invalid, lay upon his couch, trying to shut out the mirth and gaiety that floated up to him from below. As the sound of Lena's voice fell upon his ear he turned his face to the wall with a bitter groan.

"She is so like—" he muttered, grimly. "Ah! the pleasant voices of our youth turn into laces which scourge us in our old age. 'Like mother, like child.'"

The lawn fête was a grand success; the élite of the whole country round were gathered together to welcome the beautiful, peerless hostess of Stanton Hall.

Lena moved among her guests like a queen,

yet in all that vast throng her eyes eagerly sought one face.

"Where was Duncan?" was the question which constantly perplexed her. After the first waltz he had suddenly disappeared.

Only the evening before handsome Duncan Field had held her jewelled hand long at parting, whispering, in his graceful, charming way, he had something to tell her on the morrow.

"Why did he hold himself so strangely aloof?" Lena asked herself, in bitter wonder. Ah! had she but known.

While Lena, the wealthy heiress, awaited his coming so eagerly, Duncan Field was standing quite lost in thought, beside a rippling fountain in one of the most remote parts of the lawn, thinking of Madge Meadows.

He had seen a fair face—that was all—a face that embodied his dream of loveliness, and, without thinking of it, found his fate, and the whole world seemed changed for him.

Handsome, impulsive Duncan Field would have bartered every shilling of his worldly possessions for love.

He had hitherto treated all notion of love in a very off-hand, cavalier fashion.

"Love is fate," he had always said. He knew Lena loved him. Last night he said to himself, "The time has come when I might as well marry; it might as well be Lena as any else, seeing she cares so much for me." Now all that was changed. "I sincerely hope she will not attach undue significance to the words I spoke last evening," he mused.

Duncan did not care to return again among the throng; it was sweeter far to sit there by the murmuring fountain dreaming of Madge Meadows, and wondering when he should see her again. A throng which did not hold the face of Madge had no charm for him.

Suddenly a soft step sounded on the grass; Duncan's heart gave a sudden bound; surely it could not be—yes it was—Madge Meadows.

She drew back with a startled cry as her eyes suddenly encountered those of her hero of the morning. She would have fled precipitately had he not stretched out his hand quickly to detain her.

"Madge!" cried he, "why do you look so frightened? Are you displeased to see me?"

"No," she said. "I—I do not know—"

She looked so pretty, so bewildered, so dazzled by joy, yet so pitifully uncertain, Duncan was more desperately in love with her than ever.

"Your eyes speak, telling me you are pleased, Madge, even if your lips refuse to tell me so. Sit down on this rustic bench, Madge, while I tell you how anxiously I awaited your coming—waited until the shadows of evening fell."

As he talked to her he grew more interested every moment. She had no keen intellect, no graceful powers of repartee, knew little of books or the great world beyond. Madge was a simple, guileless child of nature.

Duncan's vanity was gratified at the unconscious admiration which shone in her eyes and the blushes his words brought to her cheeks.

"This is my favourite waltz, Madge," he said, as the music floated out to them. "Will you favour me with a waltz?"

"Miss Lena would be so angry," she murmured.

"Never mind her anger, Madge. I will take all the blame on my shoulders. They are unusually broad, you see."

He led her half reluctantly among the gay throng. Gentlemen looked at one another in surprise.

"Who is she?" they asked one of the other, gazing upon her in wonder.

No one could answer. The sweet-faced little maiden in soft, floating white, with a face like an angel's, who wore no other ornament than her crown of golden hair, was a mystery and a novelty. In all the long years of her after-life Madge never forgot that supremely blissful moment. It seemed to her they were floating away into another sphere. Duncan's arms were around her, his eyes smiling down into hers; he could feel the slight form trembling in his embrace, and he clasped her still closer. With

youth, music, and beauty, there was nothing wanting to complete the charm of love.

Leaning gracefully against an overarching palm-tree stood a young man watching the pair with a strange intentness; a dark, vindictive smile hovered about the corners of his mouth, hidden by his black moustache, and there was a cruel gleam in the dark, wicked eyes scanning the face of the young girl so closely.

"Ah! why not?" he mused. "It would be a glorious revenge."

He made his way hurriedly in the direction of his young hostess, who was, as usual, surrounded by a group of admirers. A deep crimson spot burned on either cheek, and her eyes glowed like stars, as of one under intense, suppressed excitement.

Vincent Dalrymple made his way to her side just as the last echo of the waltz died away on the air, inwardly congratulating himself upon finding Duncan and Madge directly beside him.

"Miss Lena," said Vincent, with a low bow, "will you kindly present me to the little fairy on your right? I am quite desperately smitten with her."

Several gentlemen crowded around Lena asking the same favour.

With a smile and a bow, what could Duncan do but lead Madge gracefully forward? Those who witnessed the scene that ensued never forgot it. For answer Lena Stanton turned coldly, haughtily toward them, and drew herself up proudly to her full height.

"There is evidently some mistake here," she said, glancing scornfully at the slight, girlish figure leaning upon Duncan's arm. "I do not recognize this person as a guest. If I mistake not, she is one of the hirelings connected with the estate."

If a thunderbolt had suddenly fallen at Duncan's feet he could not have been more thoroughly astounded.

Madge uttered a piteous little cry, and, like a tender flower cut down by a sudden rude blast, would have fallen at his feet had he not reached out his arm to save her.

"Miss Stanton," cried Duncan, in a voice husky with emotion, "I hold myself responsible for this young lady's presence here. I—"

"Ah!" interrupted Lena, ironically; "and may I ask by what right you force one so inferior, and certainly obnoxious, among us?"

Duncan's handsome face was white with rage.

"Miss Stanton," he replied, with stately dignity, "I regret, more than words express, that my heedlessness has brought upon this little creature at my side an insult so cruel, so unjust, and so bitter, in simply granting my request for a waltz—a request very reluctantly granted. An invited guest among you she may not be; but I most emphatically deny her inferiority to any lady or gentleman present."

"Duncan—Mr. Field," says Lena, icily, "you forget yourself."

He smiled contemptuously.

"I do not admit it," he said, hotly. "I have done that which any gentleman would have done—defended from insult one of the purest and sweetest of maidens. I will do more—I will shield her henceforth with my very life, if need be. If I can win her I shall make Madge Meadows my wife."

Duncan spoke rapidly, vehemently. His chivalrous soul was aroused; he scarcely heeded the impetuous words that fell from his lips. He could not endure the thought that innocent, trusting little Madge should suffer through any fault of his.

"Come, Madge," he said, softly, clasping in his own strong white ones the little fingers clinging so pitifully to his arm, "we will go away from here at once—our presence longer is probably obnoxious. Farewell, Miss Stanton."

"Duncan," cried Lena, involuntarily taking a step forward, "you do not, you cannot mean what you say. You will not allow a creature like that to separate us—you have forgotten, Duncan. You said you had something to tell me. You will not part with me so easily," she cried.

A sudden terror seized her at the thought of losing him. He was her world. She forgot the guests gathering about her—forgot she was the

wealthy, courted heiress for whose glance or smile men sued in vain—forgot her haughty pride in the one absorbing thought that Duncan was going from her. Her wild, fiery, passionate love could bear no restraint.

"Duncan," she cried, suddenly falling on her knees before him, her face white and stormy, her white jewelled hands clasped supplicatingly, "you must not, you shall not leave me so; no one shall come between us! Listen! I love you, Duncan! What if the whole world knows it—what will it matter, it is the truth. My love is my life. You loved me until she came between us with her false, fair face. But for this you would have asked me to be your wife. Send that miserable little hireling away, Duncan, the farmer will take charge of her."

Lena spoke rapidly, vehemently. No one could stay the torrent of her bitter words.

Duncan was painfully distressed and annoyed. Fortunately but very few of the guests had observed the thrilling tableau enacted so near them.

"Lena—Miss Stanton," he said, "I am sorry you have thus unfortunately expressed yourself. For your own sake I beg you will say no more. You yourself have severed this night the last link of friendship between us. I am frank with you in thus admitting it. I sympathise with you, while your words have filled me with the deepest consternation and embarrassment, which it is useless longer to prolong."

Drawing Madge's arm hurriedly within his own Duncan strode quickly down the gravelled path, with the full determination of never again crossing the threshold of Stanton Hall, or gazing upon the face of Lena Stanton.

Meanwhile Lena had arisen from her knees with a gay mocking laugh, and turned suddenly to the startled group about her.

"Bravo! bravo! Miss Lena," cried Vincent Dalrymple, stepping to her side at this opportune moment. "On the stage you would have made a grand success. We are practising for a coming charade," explained Dalrymple, laughingly; "and, judging from the expressions depicted on our friends' faces, I should say you have drawn largely upon real life. You will be a success, Miss Lena."

No one dreamed of doubting the assertion. A general laugh followed, and the music struck up again, and the gay mirth of the *fête* resumed its sway.

Long after the guests had departed Lena sat in her boudoir, her heart torn with pain, love, and jealousy, her brain filled with schemes of vengeance.

"I can not take her life!" she cried; but if I could mar her beauty—the pink-and-white beauty of Madge Meadows, that has won Duncan from me—I would do it. I shall torture her for this," she cried, "I will win him from her, though I wade through seas of blood. Hear me, Heaven," she cried, "and register my vow!"

Lena hastily rang the bell.

"Saddle Tom and Tough at once!" she said to the servant who answered her summons.

"It is after midnight, Miss Lena. I—"

There was a look in her eyes which would brook no further words.

An hour later they had reached the cottage wherein slept Madge Meadows, heedless of the danger that awaited her.

"Wait for me here," said Lena, to the groom who accompanied her. "I will not be long!"

CHAPTER IV.

"MADGE," said Duncan, gently, as he led her away from the lights and the echoing music out into the starlight that shone with a soft, silvery radiance over hill and dale, "I shall never forgive myself for being the cause of the cruel insult you have been forced to endure to-night. I declare it's a shame. I shall tell Lena so to-morrow."

"Oh, no—no, please don't, Mr. Duncan."

"I—I—had no right to waltz with you," sobbed Madge, "when I knew you were Lena's lover."

"Don't say that, Madge," responded Duncan,

warmly. "I am glad, after all, everything has happened just as it did, otherwise I should never have known how dear a certain little girl had grown to me; besides, I am not Lena's lover, and never shall be now."

"You have quarrelled with her for my sake," whispered Madge, regretfully. "I am so sorry, indeed I am."

Madge little dreamed as she watched the deep flush rise to Duncan's face, it was of her he was thinking, and not Lena, by the words, "a certain little girl."

Duncan saw she did not understand him; he stopped short in the path, gazing down into those great, dreamy, pleading eyes that affected him so strangely.

"Madge," he said, gently, taking her little hands from his arm and clasping them in his own, "you must not be startled at what I am going to tell you. When I met you under the chestnut-tree I knew I had met my fate. I said to myself 'She, and no other, shall be my wife.'"

"Your wife!" she cried, looking at him in alarm. "Please don't say so. I don't want to be your wife."

"Why not, Madge?" he asked, quickly.

"Because you are so far above me," sobbed Madge. "You are so rich, and I am only poor little Madge Meadows."

Oh, how soft and beautiful were the eyes swimming in tears, and lifted so timidly to his face! She could not have touched him more deeply. Madge was his first love, and he loved her from the first time their eyes met, with all the strength of his boyish, passionate nature; so it is not strange that the thought of possessing her years sooner than he should have dared hope, made his young blood stir with ecstasy, even though he knew it was wrong.

"Wealth shall be no barrier between us, Madge," he cried. "What is all the wealth in the world compared to love! Do not say that again. Love outweighs everything. Even though you bid me go away and forget you, Madge, I could not do it. I cannot live without you."

"Do you really love me so much in so short a time!" she asked, blushing.

"My love cannot be measured by the length of time I have known you," he answered eagerly. "Why, Madge, the strongest and deepest love men have ever felt has come to them suddenly, without warning."

The glamour of love was upon him; he could see no faults in pretty, artless little Madge. True, she had not been educated abroad, like Lena, but that did not matter; such a lovely rosebud mouth was made for kisses, not grammar.

Duncan stood in suspense beside her, eagerly watching the conflict going on in the girl's heart.

"Don't refuse me, Madge," he cried; "give me the right to protect you for ever from the cold world. Let us be married to-night. We will keep it a secret if you say so. You must—you must, Madge, for I cannot give you up!"

Duncan was so eager, so earnest, so thoroughly the impassioned lover! His hands were clinging to hers, his dark, handsome face drooped near hers, his pleading eyes searched her very soul.

Madge was young, romantic, and impressionable. A thousand thoughts rushed through her brain. It would be so nice to have a young husband to love her and care for her like Duncan, so handsome and so kind.

Then, too, she would have plenty of dresses as fine as Lena wore—all lace and puffs. She might have a carriage and ponies, too; and when she rolled by the little cottage Aunt Ann, who had always been so cruel to her, would curtsy to her as she did when Lena, the haughty young heiress, passed.

The peach-bloom on her cheeks deepened. With Madge's thoughtless, clinging nature, her craving for love and protection, her implicit faith in Duncan, who had protected her so nobly at the fête, it is not to be wondered at that Duncan won the day.

Shyly Madge raised her blue eyes to his face, and he read a coy, sweet consent that thrilled his very soul.

"You shall never regret this hour, my darling," he cried; then, in the soft, silvery twilight, he took her to his heart and kissed her rapturously.

His mother's bitter anger, so sure to follow—the cold, haughty mother who never forgot or forgave an injury—and his little sister's sorrow were at that moment quite forgotten. Even if they had been remembered they would have weighed as naught compared with his lovely little Madge, with the golden hair and eyes of blue looking up at him so trustingly.

Madge never forgot that walk on the following day through the sweet pink clover to the little church on the bank of the lonely river. The crickets chirped in the long green grass, and the breeze swayed the branches of the tall, leafy trees, rocking the little birds in their nests.

A swift, terrified look crept up into Madge's face as they entered the dim, shadowy building. Duncan took her trembling, chilled hands in his own; if he had not at that moment Madge would have fled from the place.

"Only a little courage, Madge," he whispered; "then a life of happiness."

Then, as if in a dream, she stood quite still by his side while the fatal ceremony went on. In a confused murmur she heard the questions and responses of her lover, and answered the questions put to her.

Then Duncan turned to her with a smile and a kiss.

Poor, thoughtless little Madge. It was done. In a moment she had sown the seeds from which was to spring up a harvest of woe so terrible that her wildest imagination could not have painted it.

"Are we really married, Duncan?" she whispered, as he led her out again into the sunlight. "It seems so much like a dream."

He bent his handsome head and kissed his pretty child-bride.

Madge drew back with a startled cry. His lips were as cold as ice!

"Yes, you are my very own now," he whispered. "No one shall ever have the right to scold you again. You are mine now, Madge, but we must keep it a secret from everyone for awhile, darling. You will do this for my sake, won't you, Madge?" he asked. "I am rich, so far as the world knows; but it was left to me under a peculiar condition. I—I—do not like to tell you what the condition was, Madge."

"Please tell me, Duncan," she said, timidly. "You know I am your—your—wife—now."

Madge blushed so prettily as she spoke Duncan could not refrain from catching her up in his arms and kissing her.

"You shall know, my darling!" he cried. "The condition was I should marry the bride whom my mother selected for me. I was as much startled as you will be, Madge, when you hear who it was—Lena Stanton, of Stanton Hall!"

"But you cannot marry her now, Duncan," whispered the little child-bride, nestling closer in his embrace.

"No; nor I would not if I could. I love you the best, my pretty little Madge. I would not exchange you, sweet, for all the world. I have only told you this so you may see why it is necessary to keep our marriage a secret—for the present, at least."

Madge readily consented. "You are very wise, Duncan," she said. "I will do just as you tell me."

By this time they had reached Madge's home. "I will meet you to-morrow at the chestnut-tree where first I found you. Then we can talk matters over," he said, eagerly.

Before she had time to answer the cottage door opened, and Aunt Ann appeared in the doorway. Duncan was obliged to content himself with snatching a hasty kiss from the rosy lips. The next moment he was alone.

He walked slowly back through the tangled brushwood—not to Stanton Hall, but to an adjoining hostelry—feeling as though he were in a new world.

True, it was hard to be separated from his little child-bride; but Duncan had a clever brain;

he meant to think of some plan out of the present difficulty.

His face flushed and paled as he thought of his new position. It seemed to him every one must certainly read in his face that he was a husband. Meanwhile, Madge flitted quickly up the broad gravel path to the little cottage, wondering if it were all a dream.

"Well," said Ann, sharply, "this is a pretty time o'night to come dancing home, leaving me all alone with the baking! If I hadn't my hands full of dough I'd give your ears a sound boxing! I'll see you're never out after dark again, I'll warrant!"

For a moment Madge's blue eyes blazed, and then gave way to a roguish smile.

"I wonder what she would say if she knew I was Madge Meadows no longer, but Mrs. Duncan Field?" she thought, untying the blue ribbons of her hat. And she laughed outright as she thought how amazed Aunt Ann would look, and the laugh sounded like the ripple of a mountain brook.

"Now, Aunt Ann," coaxed Madge, slipping up behind her and flinging her plump little arms around the irate spinster's neck, "please don't be cross. Indeed, I was very particularly detained."

Ann angrily shook off the clinging arms.

"You can't scold me, with your soft, purring ways into upholding you. I'm not brother George, to be hoodwinked so easily. Detained! A likely story!"

"No," laughed Madge, "but you are dear old Uncle George's sister, and I could love you for that, if for nothing else. But I really was detained. Where's Uncle George?"

"He's gone to the Hall after you, I reckon. I told him he had better stop at home—you were like a bad penny, sure to find your way back."

A sudden terror blanched Madge's face.

"When did he go, Aunt Ann?" she asked, her heart throbbing so loudly she was sure her aunt would hear it.

"An hour or more ago," Madge hastily picked up her hat again.

"Where are you going?" demanded Ann, sharply.

"I—I—am going to meet Uncle George. Please don't stop me!" she cried, darting with the speed of a young gazelle past the hand that was stretched out to stay her mad flight. "I—I—must go!"

(To be continued.)

A HASTY CONCLUSION.

—20—

LUCILE LYON was seated upon the windowledge, where the slanting rays of the afternoon sun fell full upon the scrawled page of a letter she held in her hand.

"Well!" she exclaimed, with manifest disgust, "if this is the new style of handwriting I prefer the hieroglyphics of the Egyptians. I can't read three lines of it connectedly. Nell says this is a 'swell' hand; but, if I couldn't do any better than that I'd have done with quill pens and antique stationery."

In a fit of impatience she tossed the offending epistle away from her. It fluttered a moment in the air and then fell on the floor, where it lay, neglectedly reposing on a Smyrna rug, the sunlight glancing playfully on the elegant paper, covered with queer, angular characters of a stupendous size, and the embossed text of copper-colour that spelled out the name of "Wyndon Weir" at the top.

"Fritz ought to be here," said Lucile, glancing at her watch, with no accession of amiability. "He is late about five times out of six. If we are going to play tennis we ought to be at it now."

A shirred hat of pink mull lay on the piano. Lucile tied it over her wilful brown curls, and, with her tennis apron full of balls, the rackets in her hand, she sallied forth to await the coming of her cavalier upon the lawn.

She had hardly been gone ten minutes, ere a

lithe, sinewy figure, clad in white flannel, came springing through the low French window.

"Here I am at last!" he cried, gaily, coming forward with a bunch of great Jack-roses in his hands. "Hello! no one here! She must be out on the tennis grounds."

He turned to retrace his steps, and trod on the open letter which lay in his path. As he stooped to pick it up a deep flush darkened his fair skin, then faded to an unusual whiteness. His frank, boyish blue eyes, grew pained and fearful, as they fell upon the following lines,—

"Wyndon Weir, Saturday Morning.

"My darling,—Can you come over and take luncheon with me on Tuesday! Mrs. Wyndon is going to New York . . . but . . . will be . . . chaperone us. I am tired of having that . . . Irwin fellow always . . . you, and I want you for . . . myself. Don't fail . . . I am pining to . . . you.

"Yours, devotedly,
"N. WYNDON."

"How dare he!" muttered poor Fritz, under his breath, as he crushed the letter to a stiff paper ball. "Can she have given him the right to—Good Heavens, what a fool I am! Why not? He is a much more eligible suitor than I am, though she did seem to care for me most. Care for me! Pah! The sickle fancy of a coquette, or worse than that. No doubt I have been a decoy for the millionaire's son!"

He ground his firm, white teeth fiercely as he turned on his heel and strode out over the verandah, down the gravelled walk, leaving the tennis ground away in the rear.

Miss Lyons was out on the tennis ground, battling the balls about till after sunset. Then she came in, with every bow and frown on her pretty afternoon toilet in a flutter of indignation.

Sitting down to her little ebony davenport she drew out some ragged-edged paper, and wrote concisely,—

"MR. FREDERICK IRWIN.—Sir, when I make an engagement I keep it; but I find that is not your custom. Unless you have some fitting apology for your unpardonable rudeness this afternoon, I shall consider our acquaintance at an end

"Yours very truly,
"LUCILLE ARMITAGE LYON."

Fritz got this curt epistle on Monday morning. It cut him awfully, for he prided himself on his politeness, and now that the first smart of his hurt was over he was not quite sure that he had acted well.

Still, he was a proud fellow, and he wouldn't give in.

"Miss LYON," he wrote in reply, "I have no explanation to offer for my non-appearance. I humbly confess that I have been guilty of a great rudeness towards you; but I neither ask nor expect you to pardon me, and I am ready to abide the consequences of my conduct."

"Yours very truly,
"F. C. IRWIN."

To say that Fritz was miserable in no way expresses it, but Lucille knew nothing of that.

On Tuesday, when she came home from Wyndon Weir, where she had taken luncheon, Neil Wyndon accompanied her. They walked along arm in arm through the tender gloaming.

"I am so glad you and she are fond of each other," he was saying. "I was particularly anxious that you should be friends."

"I am fond of her," said Lucille; and then she started, crying, "What was that?"

"That was Irwin," said Neil, turning his head. "I wonder why he didn't stop. He seems to be in a desperate hurry."

Lucille did not answer, but, with the toe of her dainty boot, she kicked aside a bunch of faded roses that lay in her path.

"Do you know," said Neil, picking up the dead flowers, "there is a great deal of sentiment for me in a withered rose! These have been quite pretty once—Jack, I should say—and, see here!

What is this hidden among the leaves! A note, upon my word!"

"How romantic!" cried Lucille. "Read it—do! You'll have more sentiment than you bargained for."

"But it's addressed to you, Lucille—it is, upon, my word!"

"Let me see!" she cried, somewhat nervously, and her fingers closed over the fond note that poor Fritz had written with his heart full of passionate hope. "It is nothing—nothing of any consequence," she faltered, as she tried to read with calmness the tender avowal of love he had made to her "under the rose."

They parted at the hedge gate. Neil went off whistling gladly. But instead of going into the house, Lucille slipped covertly down the path that Fritz had taken.

She knew where he was going. It was a way they had often taken together; and sure enough she found him, as she had expected to, leaning against the stile, with his arms folded and his handsome face quite wan with misery.

He started when he saw her, and lifted his hat.

"Miss Lyon!" he faltered, stepping out of her way.

"I—I have come," Lucille stammered, holding the note out to him, "to return this to you. I am afraid you did not wish me to see it. I found it quite accidentally."

A faint flush coloured Fritz's pale face, but he was not confused.

"You must have known all this long ago," he said, taking the damp paper from her hands. "I do not attempt to deny that I wrote it, for I do love you, though I did not mean to tell you after—after—"

"After what?"

"After I knew that you cared for Wyndon."

"If you are dreaming! Mr. Wyndon and I are the best of friends, but as for anything else—"

"Don't try to deceive me, Lucille!" he cried, roughly, and he took from his pocket the letter he had found and kept. "I had no right to this. I found it on the floor on Saturday, when I came to play tennis. You were not in the house. It was open and I read it. I will not reproach you, Lucille; but if you meant to marry Neil Wyndon, why did you let me linger about you till I learned how to live only in the sunshine of your smile?"

"What are you saying! I am not going to marry Neil Wyndon, Fritz."

"Then how dared he call you his darling? How dared he say—"

"Fritz! Fritz! this letter is not from Neil—though I don't wonder you made the mistake. The writing is fearful, but that is the style Neil affects."

"Neil?"

"Yes—his cousin, you know. We were school-mates."

A look that was almost beatific broke over Fritz's handsome face, and he held out his arms.

"Then you do not—" he cried, with the fervour of love on his lips and in his smile.

"Oh, yes, I do!" Lucille answered, softly.

And then and there she suffered him to set the seal of ownership upon her lips.

FACETIE.

SNAGSET: "This umbrella of mine is unique, I think." Talkingbom: "Ab, bought it, did you?"

"A most wonderful bit of work! Those things were painted by a blind painter." "What things?" "Those blinds."

JINKS: "I understand you were pretty well off before you were married?" BINKS: "Yes, but I didn't know it."

SIX MONTHS AFTER MARRIAGE: "Weel, weel, Sandy, how d'ye like the little lady?" "Ab, weel, Alas, I'll nee deny that she has fine conversational powers."

THEY were in Wales. She: "This road is very steep. Can't I get a donkey to take me up?" He: "Lean on me, my darling."

SQUIRE: "Well, Pat, doesn't that make you feel another man?" Pat: "Shure it does, your honour, and the other man want's a drink."

"HAVE you had much experience as cook?" "Oi hev, ma'am. Oi had seventeen places last year, ma'am."

EMPLOYER: "I see you have a glass eye, Pat." Pat: "Yes, yer 'anner; but it's a swindle, sir. Can't see nuthin' out of it."

A: "HAVE you ever heard the eight-year old violin player who is creating such a sensation?" B: "Oh, yes; I heard him in Berlin twelve years ago."

CLUB MAN (rather full): "I wish you'd—hic—take me home. Do you know where—hic—live?" Policeman: "What's the name of your cook?"

SIN.—Teacher: "How did sin come into the world?" The New Boy: "The preachers picked out all the things people liked to do and said they were sins."

FIRST LONDON MAN (at dull seaside hotel): "What is the most pleasing discovery you've made since your stay here?" Second London Man: "The fact that there are fifteen trains leaving daily."

LITTLE PET (on her knees before retiring): "Mamma, may I pray for rain to-morrow?" Mamma: "Y—e—s, if you want to; but why?" Little Pet: "Susie Stuckupp didn't invite me to her picnic."

LORD VERISOPHT (relating his adventures abroad): "He presented a pistol and declared he'd blow out my brains if I didn't yield." Miss Becky Sharpe: "Oh, Lord Verisopht, why didn't you yield?"

JONES: "I don't think Mrs. Batterday ever enjoyed her money so much as she does now." Mrs. Jones: "Why, she lost her money some years ago." Jones: "True; but it has supplied her with an unfailing topic of conversation ever since."

"WHY, Mary," said Mrs. Wilson to her little girl, "you and your visitors are doing nothing but sit about and look miserable. Why don't you play something?" "We are playing." "Playing what?" "We're playing that we are grown up."

LITTLE BROTHER: "That feller that comes to see you is an awful milkop. Can't understand a joke, you know." Sister: "Why do you think so?" Little Brother: "I told him all about the funny way you rush about and bang down when you get angry, and he didn't laugh a bit."

BAGWIG, Q.C., has a profound knowledge of human nature, and is in the habit of weighing cause and effect with nice discrimination. When he has won a case, he writes to his client: "I have won the action against A." But when he has lost the case, he writes: "You have lost your lawsuit with B."

CUSTOMER: "That was splendid insect-powder you sold me the other day, Mr. Oilman." Mr. Oilman (with justifiable pride): "Yes, I think it's pretty good—the best in the trade." Customer: "I'll take another couple of pounds of it, please." Mr. Oilman: "Two pounds?" Customer: "Yes, please. I gave the quarter of a pound that I bought before to a black-beetle, and it made him so ill that I think if I keep up the treatment for about a week I may manage to kill him."

CAUTIONS CRITIC: "Oh, come now, you don't mean to say seriously that is a portrait of General Sir Timothy Hotspur, V.O., K.O.B.?" Photographer: "Taken from life." "I can't understand that. I've seen Sir Timothy at the head of his brigade many a time, and he always had a fire-eating expression which no one could forget; but in the portrait he looks as meek as a lamb." "But, my dear sir, he wasn't at the head of his troops when he sat for that picture." "Well, I've seen him alone, too, and his expression was just the same. He was alone when he came here, I suppose?" "No, not exactly, his wife was with him."

SOCIETY.

The Princess of Wales and Princesses Victoria and Maud will probably spend two months in Denmark.

The Duke and Duchess of York are to spend some time at Balmoral, and a fortnight at Old Mar Lodge, with the Duke and Duchess of Fife.

The Duke and Duchess of Aosta have decided to have a home in England, so that the hope that they would each year spend some time in this country will be realized.

At the request of the Duchess of Connaught an appeal was made to officers of every regiment in the Aldershot District on the return of the troops from the New Forest, to give all the support they could to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Families Association. The whole expenses of the nurses have up to now been defrayed by the nursing branch of the association, but the Duchess felt that they should receive some local support from Aldershot Camp.

The Prince of Wales will, it is expected, be in Scotland for the last ten days of this month. His Royal Highness will visit the Queen at Balmoral and the Duke and Duchess of Fife at Old Mar Lodge. On his way south the Prince will stop at Leeds for the Musical Festival during the first week in October, when it is intended to present an address of welcome to his Royal Highness. During his stay of two days the Prince will be the guest of Mr. Ernest Beckett at Kirtall Grange, near Leeds.

It is the desire of the Empress of Russia that her child, when born, should be placed in charge of an English nurse, and brought up as she was, and on the same principles as all the English Royal babies. It is probable that the Queen or the Princess of Wales will select a nurse for her, to be in her turn supervised by the Empress's English governess, who still resides with her, so that the little Czarévitch or Grand Duchess, as the case may be, will be brought up according to our views and taught to speak from its cradle the language that its mother loves best of all.

The Crown Prince of Germany and his brother, Prince Eitel Fritz, are growing up fine manly boys, of whom their anxious parents may well be proud. There is considerable difference between the two, the elder being blonde and very like his father, and already possessing a military bearing which shows that in days to come he will, like the Emperor, be a soldier before all else. The younger one takes far more after his mother, and has dark hair, now closely cropped, instead of worn in curls as formerly. The latter has outgrown his brother, and is broader and more robust in build. He is also heavier, weighing forty-six kilos, while the Crown Prince turns the scale at thirty-six kilos. Both have the same bright and winning expression and charming manners. They are greatly attached to their suite, and all the members of the household prize the utmost devotion to their young charges. When travelling incognito the Princes are addressed as the Counts of Ravensburg, and all letters are forwarded to them under that name.

The growing taste in Russia for everything English is regarded with a certain amount of disfavour by our French neighbours. The change is of course due to the Empress Alexandra, or "Alix," as she is invariably called in the family circle. Although her Imperial Majesty is becoming much attached to her adopted country, she retains a passionate fondness for the home of her childhood, and for England, where many of the happiest hours of her girlhood were spent. Even in Darmstadt it was acknowledged that Princess Alix was more English, perhaps, than German, and it is not surprising to hear that, when possible, our language is substituted for the difficult Russian tongue, or for French, and that now the idiom is studiously practised by high and low in St. Petersburg. The Taritzas' own suite of apartments in any place which she occupies immediately assume what is described as an English aspect.

STATISTICS.

THERE are 4,041 muscles in a caterpillar.

The first German railway was opened in 1835.

The English language is spoken by 115,000,000.

THERE are forty-eight different materials used in constructing a piano, from no fewer than sixteen different countries, employing forty-five different hands.

It is estimated that the chief languages of the world are spoken by the following numbers of people—Chinese, by over 400,000,000; Hindustani, by over 100,000,000; English, by about 100,000,000; Russian, 72,000,000; German, over 60,000,000; Spanish, 48,000,000; French, 46,000,000; Japanese, over 40,000,000; Italian, over 36,000,000; Turkish, over 25,000,000.

GEMS.

ELOCQUENCE, when at its highest pitch, leaves little room for reason or discretion.

THE great thing in this world is, not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving.

THERE never did, and never will, exist anything permanently noble and excellent in the character that is a stranger to the exercise of resolute self-denial.

THERE is no talent so useful towards rising in the world, or which puts men more out of the reach of misfortune, than that quality generally possessed by the dullest sort of people, and in common speech called discretion—a species of lower prudence, by the assistance of which people of the meanest intellect, without any other qualification, pass through the world in great tranquillity and with unusual good treatment, neither giving nor taking offence.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

FRUIT COOKIES.—Two cups of sugar, two-thirds of a cup of butter, one cup of chopped raisins, one-half cup of water, one egg, three teaspoonfuls of baking powder. Flavour with cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg. Cream the butter and sugar, add the other ingredients and flour enough to render it stiff enough to roll out. Bake in a quick oven.

BLACKBERRY CORDIAL.—Wash fresh ripe berries, and mash them with a wooden spoon or mallet. Strain out the juice, and to every four quarts add one quart of boiling water. Let stand in a cool place twenty-four hours, stirring occasionally. Strain again, and to every gallon of liquid add two heaping pints or two pounds and a half of the best white sugar. Stir it well, and cork in jugs or wai in cans.

CURRENT SPONGE.—Press one pint of currants through a colander. Cover three teaspoonfuls of gelatine with about four tablespoonfuls of water, soak a minute, then stir over the fire until the gelatine is dissolved. Add half a cup of sugar to the currant juice, then the gelatine, and when it begins to congeal, and is just a little thick, stir into it the well-beaten whites of two eggs. Put in a mould and stand aside until perfectly cold.

GINGER ALE.—Slice up four large lemons, add one tablespoonful of tartaric acid, four tablespoonfuls of tartaric acid, four tablespoonfuls of ground ginger, one and a half pounds of light brown sugar, and two gallons of boiling water. When blood-warm put in a cupful of home-made yeast or two compressed yeast cakes, and let it stand twelve or fifteen hours in a warm place. Strain, bottle, and tie down the corks; there is a simple knock about this that is worth learning. In two days it will be ready for use.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE surface of Mars seems to resemble very much that of the earth at the tropics.

RUBBER was little used, except for erasing, until 1820, 300 years after its discovery.

A TYPEWRITER for making entries in books of record has been invented. It is chiefly designed for the use of bookkeepers.

WHEN a snake has gorged itself with a large meal its skin is so stretched that the scales are some distance apart.

SCIENTISTS say that the orange was originally a berry, and that its evolution has been going on for more than a thousand years.

It is believed that camels are the only animals that cannot swim. Just after entering deep water they turn on their backs and are drowned.

SNOW, at a very low temperature, absorbs moisture. Arctic travellers take advantage of this fact by spreading their wet clothes on the snow, and they soon dry.

THE pneumatic principle has been applied to boots. The air tubes lie between the upper and lower soles, and give a springy movement to the foot, calculated to reduce friction with the ground and to alleviate fatigue.

THE roar of the lion can be heard farther than the sound of any other living creature. Next comes the cry of the hyena, and then the hoot of an owl. After these the panther and the jackal. The donkey can be heard fifty times farther than the horse.

ONE of the most remarkable exports of the Gold Coast is that of monkey skins. During the last five years an average of 175,000 monkey skins, valued at £30,000, have been annually exported. Only skins in good condition and with few shot-holes are taken.

THE House of Commons is protected from fog by the following method, which is both ingenious and expensive. The air pumped in from the river terrace is forced by steam fans through thick layers of cotton wool, which retain all impurities, leaving the air in a state of great purity. The layers of cotton wool are six inches in thickness, and occupy an area of 800 square feet.

THE national airs of great countries are short, while those of little countries are long. "God Save the Queen" is fourteen bars, the Russian hymn is sixteen bars, and "Hail, Columbia!" has twenty-eight bars. Siam's national hymn has seventy-six bars, and that of Uruguay seventy. Chile's forty-six, and so on. San Marino has the longest national hymn except China's, which is so long that people take half a day off to listen to it.

CIVILIZED womanhood has so long regarded hairpins as essential that it is curious to find that no native Indian woman ever uses them, whether it be the little Bengali or Madras girl-bride, who oils her long locks before she plaits them, and makes a neat knot into which she places a flower, before making the parting in front with red lead, or whether it be the hard-working Kol or Santal agricultural tribes-woman, who will spend her day in the fields, after twisting her hair into a tight knob, which will remain tidy until she chooses to loosen it. The prettiest hairdressing of all India is to be seen upon the Malabar coast, where Nayar women who wear no clothes above their waists, make their soft, abundant hair into one thick coil, which they throw into a coquettish roll toward the top of the left of the head, where it remains without pins. On the other hand, the women dwelling in some parts of the West Coast of Africa stick several pins, surmounted by large triangular pieces of metal, into their woolly chignons. These metallic additions are sharpened to razor keenness, and are indeed used to shave away the hair where West-Coast fashion does not consider it ornamental to the head; but they have another purpose as well, as these ladies are somewhat Amazonian in temperament, and employ them at times as weapons of offence and defence in feminine quarrels.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

THESSALIA.—Register it at the Home Office.

S. L.—Apply to the chief engineer on board.

ENQUIRE.—The owner must himself bear the loss.

C. R.—You had better overhaul a press directory.

RICHARD.—We cannot say where the stone came from.

ROGER.—Prime Minister gets no salary when out of office.

QUEST.—We are afraid not, except to a collector of curiosities.

ANXIOUS TO KNOW.—We cannot afford the space to instruct you.

TROUBLED.—Plucking out is the effectual plan if you can accomplish it.

OLD READER.—Sponge with benzine collas diluted with a little water.

CURIOUS.—London is believed to be the most civilized place in the world.

M. P.—Old coins are worth just what they will fetch; there is no fixed value.

R. G.—We are not aware that any particular signification is attached to it.

SIR ROSE.—Wait until an exhibition of the sort is announced and then apply.

BASTIAN.—We are unable to undertake to write privately to correspondents.

BERNARD.—Your old book is absolutely worthless, because the title page is wanting.

N. V.—We are not in the business, and have not therefore knowledge to advise you.

WORRIED.—Advertise in the Italian papers at the place where they were last heard of.

UNGAIRLY.—A pair of light dumb-bells will aid to throw out the chest and make the form erect.

HONA.—Violent swinging of the arms, while walking in the street, should be avoided by all young girls.

INTERMITTER.—There are trees in California quite big enough to accommodate a restaurant in their trunks.

H. L.—Apply to the secretary, Chelsea Hospital, for information regarding pension; state your case to him.

INEXPERIENCED.—There is no examination; you just set up in business, open an office, and advertise yourself.

V. W.—"Men are but children of a larger growth," will be found in Dryden's play of *All for Love*; act IV., scene 1.

CECIL.—Every healthy male of twenty years in France is liable to military service, but exceptions are made in favour of students.

UNHAPPY TED.—Write a letter to the young lady explaining all the circumstances, and she will no doubt consent to make it up.

HOUSEWIFE.—Rubbing the roughened glass with a soapy cloth dipped in finest emery powder should remove the obscuration.

GLADIE.—When it is desirable to have the thin summer dresses especially stiff, add a teaspoonful of borax to the cold starch.

INFRA DIG.—The fewer presents young people exchange before they are engaged the better, especially in extremely valuable articles.

OFFENDED.—If there be any foundation whatever for their censure we advise you to take it in good part, and endeavour to correct the habit referred to.

DISTRESSED.—It is beyond cure, having been improperly treated at first it has now begun to rot, and there is no way by which that can be prevented.

INDIGNATION.—We can only suggest that you let them alone, doing nothing, saying nothing to annoy them. In time they may see the error of their ways.

W. B.—It is not necessary for a Frenchman to report himself when coming to this country for instance, but going into continental countries he must have a passport.

SARAH GANT.—Your collection of English stamps is practically valueless. The Australian and American might realise a trifle. You should advertise them in a suitable medium.

X. Y.—Probably you might do it with spirits of turpentine, standing the vessel in a warm water bath till softened and mixed, and when thoroughly softened and mixed strain through canvas.

MOLLY.—There are many of the fashionable fabrics that will not bear water spots without being spoiled. This dress may be one of them, although there is no mention as to what the material is.

TOO SROU.—The world is full of people who are searching for a remedy for too much flesh. Be very careful of your diet, and take a great deal of exercise. Long walks are excellent as flesh reducers.

SIN DENIS.—The three dimensions are length, breadth, and thickness; these determine all known forms of extension; it is sometimes suggested that a fourth dimension may apply to space, which as far as is known cannot be measured by either of the three mentioned; but this is purely guess work or speculative.

BURNING POST.—It is desirable to have manuscript legibly written on one side of the sheets of paper. The kind of paper makes very little difference, so long as it is of sufficient consistency to be easily handled.

FOURLEED.—Irish and Scotch Gaelic are not quite the same, but have so many words in common that a Highlander and an Irish Celt who could only speak their native languages would manage to understand each other.

STEVIE.—Campania is the popular name of the plain surrounding Capua, in Italy. It is properly called *Terra di Etruria*. Campana is pronounced as though spelled Kam-pa-ya; the accent on the second syllable.

VARIAN.—A man may set bones without having any diploma, but if he extends his practice to the prescribing of medicines and attendance upon people without being duly licensed then he can be proceeded against and sent to prison.

HARD WORKER.—It might be that by fully stating your desires you might be taken for a month or so on trial; then, if you proved yourself capable and industrious, you would probably be able to make a permanent arrangement.

META.—Remove any scratch or marks that may be present with finely pulverized pumice-stone, moistened with water. Then wash the ivory and polish with prepared chalk, applied moist upon a piece of chamois leather, rubbing quickly.

DOUBTFUL.—As a rule, it is quite as well for young persons to go in parties, or with some older persons. The tongue of scandal is very sharp, and it is just as well for young people to avoid anything that enmity or envy may use to their injury.

MY LITTLE ONE.

There are days and days, little one!
Some full of cloudy weather,
Some full of sun,
Some full of happy memories,
Like diamonds set
In the dull, old gold of the days
You are wishing to forget.

And over all stern duty moths
At work that is never done;
I long to know how you will bear
Them all—these days, my little one;
Will they falter, the weary feet,
As day and night and day slip by
On wings that are so fleet,
Till you have trod the whole long way?

And will the promised rest
Beyond the Portal Gate
Seem indeed like heaven
As you stand and wait?
Or will your restless soul
Turn back down the way,
To gather up the treasures
You have dropped from day to day?

Ah well! There are days and days, little one!
Some full of cloudy weather,
Some full of sun;
And I know that he who loves you
Will keep you, little one.

M. A.

LEILA.—The best way to clean silver jewellery is to brush it with fine silver polish or precipitated chalk and alcohol. After a thorough brushing, wash it in hot soapuds, taking care that all of the powder is cleaned out of any irregularities or figures in the articles.

ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—It is not customary for any but commissioned officers on retirement or while serving to use the letters R.N. after their names with the view of distinguishing themselves from individuals holding similar rank to those in the army.

A QUESTIONER.—"A forlorn hope" is the volunteering of a small band to force a pass, march against an outwork, or dare the first perils of a breach, any one of which undertakings is usually attended with a murderous slaughter, and with a risk of total annihilation.

V. D.—You might try by boiling a quarter of a pound of fuller's earth and a quarter of a pound of pearl ash in one quart of water, and while hot spreading it on the stained surface, allowing it to remain there for fifteen to eighteen hours, and then scouring it off with sand and water.

PAUL DOWNEY.—A kettle with boiling water in it, just taken from the fire, is comparatively cool at the bottom, because the heat is mounting upwards through the water. Were it not so, the kettle would soon become red-hot on the fire, which it never does so long as there is water in it.

B. D. R.—No one can give you instructions how to write a novel or romance. If after reading all the best works in that department of literature you cannot sit down and write a tale, by intuition as it were, you may consider that you have no taste in that respect, and you should abandon the attempt.

NETTA.—Take a large wooden spoon, or a saucer, and mix in it the following things: One teaspoonful sugar, two teaspoonfuls vinegar, half teaspoonful mustard, half teaspoonful salt, quarter teaspoonful pepper. Mix all these things, putting in the vinegar last, and pour it over the salad, then pour over again either two tablespoonfuls of cream or one of cream and one of salad oil. Stir up the salad when ready to be used.

P. G.—Rosa. four ounces; castor oil, two ounces; essence lemon, one drachm; methylated spirits, one pint; let it till dissolved and strain them; apply with a brush. To prepare the paper dissolve one ounce alum in a pint of water and dip the paper that is to be brushed over, and hang over a line to dry; when dry brush over with rosin solution.

IN WANT OF ADVICE.—It is always better to err on the side of extreme courtesy than to fall short of common civility. If your courtesy is not appreciated, or returned by the one upon whom it is bestowed, you will gain an advantage over him or her, as the case may be, to the extent that you have proved yourself a gentleman entitled to respect, if not receiving it.

ANICE.—Two tablespoonfuls of alcohol, half tablespoonful ammonia, one teaspoonful of ether mixed together; lay the mixture on the oil spot, and then take a sponge and clean water and rub and it will disappear; or a simpler recipe is two breakfast cups of boiling water, half ounce powdered borax, quarter ounce gum camphor; shake all together in a bottle; it is excellent for washing out grease stains or blacking stains; but ammonia and water rubbed on does very well also.

B. P. G.—New Caledonia is a French convict settlement; it is a large island off the coast of Australia; both male and female convicts are sent there, not to be kept always in jail, but to be looked up at night and employed in the fields during the day; by good conduct the convicts can obtain liberty to marry and live away from the central settlement on little farms of their own; marriage is not permitted in French prisons in fact, the prisoners are very generally hired out to employers.

FRANCOIS.—It should be the study of all who affect good style at all to dress rather within than beyond the limits of fashionable attire, which undergoes changes from time to time in accordance with the fashions which all fashions are subject, whether in favour as a whole or not. When these changes meet the eye a woman of good taste will readily decide in her mind as to the propriety of accepting them, especially if they be so radical as to excite universal remark. There is a proper conservatism in all matters.

TABITHA.—To two teaspoonfuls of sour milk add a teaspoonful of soda; when dissolved, add one cupful of butter or lard, and enough flour to make a soft dough; roll into thin cakes the size of the frying-pan, dust the pan with flour, put in a cake and cook over the fire; when the under side is done, turn quickly and cook the other; split the cakes while hot and butter well; lay one half on a plate, then a layer of well-sugared strawberries, next the other half of the cake, then more strawberries, and so on until there are six layers. Serve hot.

GERTRUDE.—Boil a lot of vegetables in the boiler, potato skins or cabbage leaves. That does some good. Another way is to rub it thoroughly over with grease, then put soda and water in, and boil for a good while. When it is washed out rub it up very hard; but you may find that your only "cure" is to boil your clothes in a large bag. Sometimes it is found necessary, after filling the boiler with water, to throw in about sixpenny worth of vitriol and leave it overnight, then clean out in the morning. This latter process is best for a new boiler.

NEAPOLITAN.—Take four breakfast cups of milk, two teaspoons corn flour, half pound sugar, one teaspoonful essence of vanilla; heat the milk and add to it the corn flour with a little cold milk; let it boil, then stir in the sugar and the vanilla, and set it aside to get quite cold, then freeze it. Any other flavour may be added instead of vanilla; lemon or strawberry, or a tablespoonful of chocolate may be boiled with the corn flour, and is good for a change. The cream may be made with skim milk, and an egg put in well beaten up; after it has boiled that makes it a little yellow.

BELLE MAROKE.—Make puff paste with half pound flour, six ounces of butter, and the yolk of an egg. The paste has to be carefully made and rolled out six times. We presume you know how to make it. Cut the tartlets with a round cutter the size you want, and mark a small bit in the centre with a smaller cutter. Brush them over with egg, and put in a quick oven for twenty minutes. Then pick out the middle bit and fill with jam. Puffs are rolled out much thinner, the same paste, and cut with a larger cutter, the inside edged over, a little jam put in, and doubled over. The top brushed with egg or water and dusted with sugar, and baked twenty minutes.

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